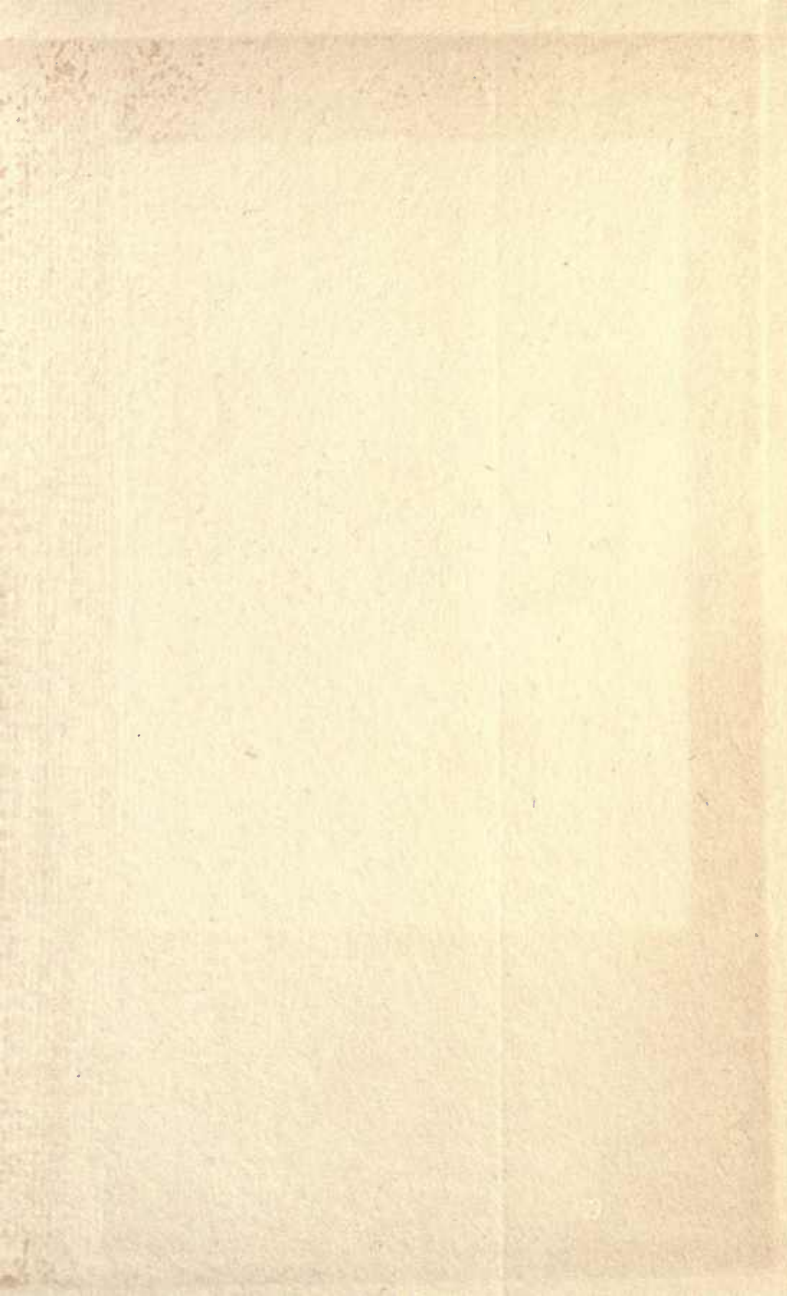


The Last of the Irish Chiefs

By Mrs. M. T. Pender



IRENE DWEN ANDREWS



THE LAST OF THE IRISH CHIEFS,

BY MRS. M. T. PENDER.

MARTIN LESTER, LIMITED,
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MRS. M. T. PENDER'S NOVELS.

The Green Cockade

Married in May

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THE LAST OF THE IRISH CHIEFS.

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Chapter 1.

IRENE AND UNA.

It was in the early years of the reign of the first James of England, when for the first time in her long and chequered history Ireland unwillingly acknowledged herself a conquered nation.

The long, bloody wars of Elizabeth were over—wars which had shaken that proud princess on her throne, and reduced Ireland to a kingdom of carcases and ashes.

Peace then fell on the land—the profound peace of exhaustion. King James, like many another tyrant, began his reign well. In this lull after a mighty storm, the old were fain to rest, the young to hope; and in this lull, so soon to be rudely and terribly disturbed, our story opens.

It was a still, mild night in February, 1607. On that night all the windows of Buncrana Castle were ablaze with brilliant light; guests in splendid attire sauntered about the castle courts and passages, laughing, jesting, or lovemaking, as fancy led them; the servants, flitting constantly hither and thither, and the vassals who thronged the approaches to the castle were all in holiday dress.

Within and without was the sound of joyous bustle and merry-making. Never before had the stately old fortress by Lough Swilly witnessed such splendid rejoicings, although the occasion was one which ancient Irish custom never permitted to pass without suitable jubulations.

The occasion was the marriage of the chief. Some two weeks before the young lord of the castle, Sir Cahir O'Doherty, had brought home beautiful Mary Preston to be its lady and mistress.

Some two hours before the appointed time at which the guests were expected to assemble, and dancing was to commence, two young girls were seated together, in a handsome boudoir or dressing-room, the wide windows of which looked out on the heaving waters of Lough Swilly.

The wide windows were shaded by silken curtains; the walls were draped with rich arras, in stripes of blue and gold, and the floor was covered with a Brussels carpet—a costly luxury at a date when green rushes or plaited straw matting were deemed good enough for the feet of kings.

The pair to whom this pretty sanctuary was allotted were stationed near a window of the dressing-room; one was dark, the other fair; while the appearance of both was striking. The dark girl was something more than pretty, but the beauty of the fair one was almost dazzling.

Irene Magennis, the dark maiden, was tall, slight, and supple as an osier. Her features were small and delicately moulded; she had a pale, clear, olive complexion, a sweet, tender, mouth, rich dark hair, and great, soft, dusk eyes, lustrous and dreamful as southern stars—the eyes of a poet or a musician.

Her companion, Una M'Laughlin, was voluptuous and large of form, yet delicately graceful. Snowy-skinned, violet-eyed, blooming like a freshly-opened rose, as she sat on her pile of cushions in the deep window-niche, loosely arrayed in a white robe-de-chambre, and engaged, while she talked, in combing out her rich red-gold hair that waved over her white dress down to her very feet, in many a shining coil and tangle, a glance was sufficient to show that she was lovely—lovely beyond all comparison.

These two girls stood towards each other in that strange and unique relationship which had no parallel outside of Ireland—they were foster-sisters.

Una was the daughter of old Bryan MacLaughlin, of Carnagall, a chief whose ancestors had been amongst the most powerful and illustrious of Ireland's kings, but who was now nothing more than a staunch tributary of Sir Cahir O'Doherty.

Irene Magennis, of the noble family of Iveagh, had been "fostered" in the house of MacLaughlin, and brought up by them from her earliest years." The affection subsisting between the two girls was even more than sisterly; and the venerable chieftain of Carn gall often declared that he knew not which of his two dear daughters he loved best.

"What a sudden marriage Sir Cahir's was, Irene!" Una was saying. "Why, he left us without a thought of matrimony, to go to London about those odious letters patent. Very soon we heard of his return to Dublin. But time went on, and Sir Cahir did not come. Then an army of masons, carpenters, and upholsterers made their appearance in Buncrana, and lo! a fairy mansion springs up, like magic, and, before people have ceased wondering what it all means, the chief comes home in triumph with a lovely bride!"

"Oh! had you seen Lady O'Doherty last night, Rene, she looked gorgeous! only for that horrid ruff, she was every inch a chieftain's bride—and I can tell you, little Shawn-na-Cobbereigh admired her, or her jewels, with all his might."

"Who is Shawn-na-Cobbereigh?" inquired Irene.

"Oh, that is a name we have dubbed the Lord Deputy," answered the young girl with a merry laugh—"young O'Hanlon, of Orior, and I—he is so small, and so cross, and so wicked, and so sly—besides he has been a miserable mar-feast since he came here three days ago."

"Poor man, he has not secured your favour, at all events," said Irene, with a smile, "but what has he done?"

"He has done, and he has not done—He will neither hunt, hawk, dance nor sing; he plays nothing but cards; he plays only for exorbitant stakes, and he always wins. Young O'Hanlon lost fifty rose-nobles to him last night, and O'Doherty a hundred; and he told them, in his hateful, slimy tones, that when they had played with him a little longer, they would esteem such a trifle but a small loss."

"Then he creeps about, prying into every corner, examining the tapestry, weighing the plate with his hands, as if he were taking an inventory of Sir Cahir's goods. He rode around O'Doherty's border castles, Culmore, Aileach, Burt and Inch, counting the guns, inspecting the stores, noting the strength of the walls and the depth of the ditches. Afterwards he made a survey of the rich

corn and pasture lands, taking stock of crops and cattle—yesterday I caught him peering into the trout-pools of the Cranagh river as if he would fain count the fish!"

"And Sir Cahir—how did he take all this?" inquired Irene, anxiously.

"Oh, he seems much pleased to display all his fair possessions; and you know he was always the very pink of courtesy. But I—I cannot endure the avarice of the little monster!"

"I do not see how he could injure O'Doherty," observed Irene, after a long pause—"still, the glance of a covetous eye is evil—God avert it! And now tell me, dear, about yourself, and the Highland lord, and Sir George Paulett, and poor Shiel O'Brasil—are they all here?"

"The Highland lord is not here," answered Una, "and I hope never to see him more. Sir George Paulett has been here from the first, and has constituted himself my arch-tormentor. He follows me about like a savage bear, growling ominously at all who cross his path. Thirdly and lastly, Shiel O'Brasil is not here."

"And you have not seen him?"

"Alas no! never once since that dreadful day"——

"When you refused the heir of Argyll, Una, and your father discovered that it was this poor and nameless cavalier who stood between you and the proudest coronet in broad Scotland." "You forget," said Irene, with her expressive smile, "that he is son of the mighty M'Callum Mor—'the Lord God of the Hielands,' as his vassals have it."

"I am not likely to forget it," answered Una, sadly, "for in that lay half the trouble. My father, you know, with all his wisdom and philosophy, is insane on the subject of pedigree; and he has set his heart on giving me to this haughty noble because his family is of an ancient Celtic stock. Then, in a tempest of passion and disappointment, he forbade O'Brasil the house, and made that dreadful vow before the Three Shrines that I should never wed with one of less noble blood. I hope the redoubtable Governor will be as little acceptable to my father as poor, gallant, true O'Brasil was!"

"Nay, I know not that, Una. In these altered days our father may discriminate widely between King James' wealthy and powerful Governor of Derry and Sir Cahir O'Doherty's young captain of

horse. Besides, have you not noticed the pains this Paulett takes to ingratiate himself in our father's favour? He has found the key, Una, and if he succeed—child, if he should succeed?"

"Succeed? Oh, Rene, I never knew you cruel before! Why do you put such a horrible eventuality before me?"

"Only to warn you, Una dhas—Beware."

Chapter 2.

RIVALS—A PASSAGE-AT-ARMS.

Between the windows of the boudoir and the waves of Lough Swilly stretched a narrow strip of garden merging into a yet narrower strip of sandy beach. In the centre of this space stood a huge equestrian statue, carved in wood, representing Manannan, the Irish Neptune, astride his wild, white steed. He held a white willow wand, the Irish emblem of sovereignty, aloft in his right hand; while his short cochal and long hair, both painted sea-green, and fringed with snowy foam, streamed out behind him.

A sharp breeze from the north-west had begun to roughen the surface of the water and drive the low, gray clouds before it; and now the moon shone out clearly on the dancing waves, marking them with a long, tremulous track of glittering light that ran straight across the lovely Lake of Shadows, spanning it from shore to shore like a silver bridge.

Right in the centre of this strip of radiance the outline of a tiny barque, sinking and rising with the waves as they rose and fell, her square lug-sail braced sharply up to the freshening nor-wester, a small pennon fluttering at the mast, and a man sitting in the stern-sheets, grasping the tiller, was now clearly defined against the moonlit water.

Una MacLaughlin watched its approach with looks of intent and eager interest.

"Something in the cut and the rig of that boat seems familiar to me," she said, with a strange tremor in her low, sweet tones.

"I wish I could see that pennon!" "there, look again! Oh, Rene, it is, it is"—clasping her white hands, while a wave of lovely light and colour swept over her face—"it is O'Brasil's pennon!"

As the young girl spoke, the boatman ran into the landing-place, and putting his helm hard up, came sheering close alongside, and leaped ashore.

Sheil O'Brasil, O'Doherty's captain of horse, was a tall and comely youth, with a bold, soldierly bearing, a frank, handsome face, dark, curling hair, and fine dark eyes, full of passion, and power—eyes to captivate and to command.

"Shiel!" cried Una, leaning from the open window, and holding out both her hands, while her soft eyes filled with tears—"Oh, Shiel!"

"My love, my darling, my Una ban!" answered the young man, in tones of ecstasy, as he flung his arms around the lovely girl and drew her gently towards him.

They remained thus for a few seconds heart to heart, lip to lip, forgetful of everything on earth but each other; while the moonlight fell clearly on Una's white dress, and glinted on the silver hilts of O'Brasil's sword and skene. Then the night wind that sported with Una's hair carried away the sound of a kiss and a curse commingled.

Una did not hear the curse; the kiss had filled her gentle breast with a tumult of sweet emotion, and the music of love was in her heart and ear. For a similar reason, the sinister sound escaped O'Brasil's hearing.

"I am so glad you came, Shiel!"

"You are glad, my Una?—you have seen no one else, then, in my absence, you loved better than me?"

"You naughty boy, to ask me such a question!"

"Listen Una; luckless and hapless wretch that I am! I had fully determined to give you up. It seemed a crime, as well as a folly, in one like me to aspire to your love—to indulge the mad dream of making you my wife. I thought I could give you up. But my lonely tower in which I kept garrison was not lonely enough. Even there, rumours reached me that tore my soul—that stung me like scorpions. At last—at last, Una, I could bear my torment no longer, and—I am here."

"Holy St. Finian of Moville!" cried Una, looking into the dark face of the youth, with lovely, tearful, frightened eyes—"What dreadful things, O'Brasil, were these you heard?"

"First of all, Una, that the haughty heir of Argyll, pining like a wounded eagle in his Highland home, only awaits a word to bring him to your feet again."

"Shiel, that word never shall be spoken."

"You know I love you!" exclaimed the youth passionately. "I love you, Una! and these things made me mad!"

"Is there anything more?" questioned the fair girl, with a pretty pout of her tremulous lips and a flash of her violet eyes, in which tears were springing. "Haste! It will soon be time for us to dress for the ball. You will be there of course?"

"I will be there if you are."

"You have been thinking evil thoughts against me, Shiel O'Brasil, and perhaps I have not yet heard the worst of them," continued she, gathering up a stray tress of her bright hair that had somehow entwined itself around her lover's neck. "Come, sir captain, until I have heard even the least of them I will not promise to dance with you to-night."

"Will you dance with me, darling—before them all?"

"Oh, I don't know. Come, sir, confess, confess! There is something yet unspoken behind that luring eye of yours."

"Sir George Paulett—," began O'Brasil, with a frown.

"I thought so—I thought so!" cried Una, bursting into a merry laugh—"a formidable spectre, he!"

"He is Governor of Derry," pursued the young soldier, heavily.

"Woe worth the day!" interjected Una.

"He is rich."

"With spoiling our people, and robbing our churches."

"He has a strong town and garrison at his command, backed by all the power of King James and his Lord Deputy. In this country, therefore, he is mighty. He is daring, he is unscrupulous. Your beauty has enslaved him; and I am told your father favours him."

At the same moment Irene Magennis, who, at O'Brasil's approach, had quietly withdrawn to the other window, and stationed herself there with the double object of leaving the lovers alone, and keeping watch against possible intruders, uttered a sharp cry

of terror and amazement.

"The statue!" she gasped—"Manannan Dhia! he is moving—coming—oh!" As she spoke there was the sound of a dull, heavy thud, with a clang and jingle of armour.

O'Brasil wheeled round, his arm still clasping Una's waist, and saw—great heaven! could he believe his senses?—the huge wooden Manannan flashing down from the horse's back, and striding fiercely towards him! Doubting the evidence of his senses, O'Brasil, shut his eyes for a second, rubbed them, and looked again.

He had only time to see that the gigantic back of the white steed was bare; and that a mailed figure was springing towards him, his armour clanking at every step; his short cloak sweeping backwards, his naked sword in his right hand, and the moonlight gleaming on his plumed morion, and on the polished cuirass, gorget, thigh, and shoulder-pieces of his glittering coat of steel armour.

Una had given but one wild glance at the wooden steed and the advancing figure, she uttered a little, gasping, shuddering cry, made an effort to withdraw from the window, but, overcome with terror, sank fainting on O'Brasil's shoulder. O'Brasil viewed the ill-omened and untimely apparition with feelings of wrath and amazement, not all unmixed with a certain dash of superstitious awe.

It was an age of superstition, of magic, gramarye and fairy-lore; and all that our young soldier knew of his own birth and origin was shrouded in an impenetrable haze of mystery, unreality and wild romance. He was a waif of the waters, nursed by the mermaids, pillowed on the waves, and given up by these strange caretakers, under circumstances of the strangest nature, without sign, or line, or word of record. And here, now, was Manannan, the wild god of the sea, springing from his courser's back and stalking towards him with angry strides, glistening in scales of steel, his sceptred rod transformed into a naked sword!

As the figure advanced with clanking stride and jangling heel, he suddenly threw up the barred aventaye of his plumed helmet, to obtain, apparently, a better view; whereupon a face was revealed whose features and expression emulated each other in ugliness, meanness, and malignity. The wolfish eyes were now ablaze with fury, the fang-like teeth seemed ready to rend and tear.

The moment O'Brazil's eye fell on this repulsive countenance, a scarlet flush mounted to his own—a flush of fierce anger, mingled with shame for his own momentary and unacknowledged weakness.

“Sir George Paulett!” he exclaimed, in tones of haughty displeasure and astonishment—“How now, sir?”

“By the rood! thou gallows churl and food for corbies! dost thou how now me?” roared the ill-favoured Governor of Derry, in a voice halting and stammering with excess of rage. “Begone, rapparee! I’ll teach you how you insult this lady by your thievish presence!”

“When did this lady constitute thee her protector, thou Hampshire hog?” retorted O’Brasil, his short, dark-bearded lip curling with disdain.

“Dog-captain! have at thee!” stuttered the Knight of Derry, wrapping his cloak around his left arm and lunging furiously with his sword.

“Wouldst thou kill the lady?” cried O’Brasil, parrying the reckless blow which would otherwise have passed through Una’s lovely arm that drooped across his shoulder. “Hold! hold, I say, in the name of manhood!—coward! would you kill her?”

“Nay, I will hack thee piecemeal, before her eyes—by the rood, spit thee, like a spatchcock!—and hang thee afterwards on the high gates of Derry, till the crows have picked thee bare, and thy bones rattle like a gipsy’s castanets!” panted Paulett, redoubling his exertions to overcome his opponent, and showering his blows like hail.

“The lady!—the Lady Una!” cried O’Brasil. “Let me first place her in safety, and, by my soul, I will render you a liar and full reckoning of all that is between us.”

“The lady! the lady! mimicked Paulett, in sneering and taunting tones. “Paillard! ’tis for your skin you fear, because it is not sheathed in metal.”

“Close your umbriere, Sir George Paulett,” retorted O’Brasil, as the point of his straight-bladed sword at that moment ripped up the skin of the governor’s cheek.

“For God’s sake, cease, gentlemen!—for our sake!” implored, liene stretching out her arms from the window. “I beseech you Sir George Paulett, have a care!—have a care!” At this moment

hurried steps and loud voices were heard approaching.

"What ho ! there, gallow glasses of the guard !" exclaimed a clear, sonorous, youthful voice, speaking in the Irish tongue, and in the tones of one accustomed to be obeyed, "fellows, ye are lax in your duty ! who has dared to draw their weapons within the precincts of this castle against our special order, by St. Columb ! under the very eyes, I may say, of so many fair and gentle ladies?"

"Sir Cahir O'Doherty !—thank God, thank God !" exclaimed Irene, clasping her hands over her bosom, and raising her dark eyes heavenward with a look of rapture.

Sir George Paulett suddenly lowered the point of his sword.

"We are interrupted," he said, sullenly, "the fates are in thy favour—this bout cannot be played out now."

"The game will bear renewing," answered O'Brasil, sternly, but lowering his voice that he might not be overheard by the ladies; "name your time and place, sir?"

"To-morrow, then, at sunset, in the old fort of Aileach," replied Paulett, watching, with a snakey gleam in his red eye, the drops that trickled from his bleeding cheek, and splashed his bright corset and his steel glove.

"I will be there," returned O'Brasil, briefly.

"Alone, remember I!"

"Alone be it I!"

Paulett gave him a glance of fury, which was divided equally with the drooping maiden, then he turned on his heel, strode round an angle of the building, and passed out of sight.

O'Brasil only waited to press a kiss on Una's lovely lips, and then, with a fond, parting word, as he resigned her into the arms of Irene, he, too, hurried away. The next moment Sir Cahir O'Doherty, accompanied by his henchman, Cawbar, and three or four stout gallow-glasses of his guard, swinging their formidable battleaxes, advanced around the opposite angle of the castle.

When O'Brasil retreated to his boat, he found her still moored to the neck of the wooden Manannan; the statue had fallen on the seaward side of the horse, dismounted, as the young man at once perceived, by the straining of the painter, probably assisted by a kick from the irate Governor of Derry, who, after skulking and eavesdropping about the window of the boudoir, had sprung on

the back of the gigantic steed, as Irene opened the window, and crouched for concealment beneath the outspread cloak of the wooden sea-god.

There he had remained, a witness of the tender scene between the lovers, until his jealous rage and fury could contain themselves no longer.

Chapter 3.

THE LORD DEPUTY AT THE BALL.

Dancing had been in full swing for over an hour in the great hall of Buncrana Castle. The ballroom was thronged with the youth and beauty—the haute noblesse of three races, English, Scotch, and Irish—and presented a peculiarly splendid and festive appearance.

The vast apartment was hung with crimson arras, embroidered everywhere with the arms of O'Doherty. The walls were adorned with pieces of ancient armour; antique bucklers of bull-hide, with ribs and rims of bronze; helmets, shields and corslets of gold and silver, chased and inlaid with exquisite workmanship—the handicraft of an earlier and a happier age.

The hall was filled by a brilliant and varied assemblage, including many high-born and gallant Scots; some in ruffs and velvets, but not a few in their picturesque national gear, with gay tartans, and tufted sporrans, and jewelled dirks in their embroidered girdles.

There, too, were many noble dames and gentlemen of the English Pale, all gorgeous in the magnificent fashions and fopperies of the day; all tricked out in silks and velvets, and cloth of gold and silver, and all stiff, haughty, and ceremonious.

A striking contrast to all these, in dress, language, look, and manner, were the Irish chiefs and ladies, in their distinctive Celtic costumes.

The Irish, secretly scorning the mushroom noblesse of the Pale, with a scorn begotten in an ancient land, of uncounted centuries

of noble blood, and looking on them as nameless and penniless adventurers who had fattened on the fields of Ireland, regarded their haughty airs with covert contempt, wonder, or amusement; while a few looked on them with good-tempered indulgence, as merely some of the pardonable eccentricities of their queer foreign breeding.

At the opposite end of the hall was a crimson-carpeted and canopied dais, raised three steps above the level of the floor, and here, on a gilt and carved oaken chair, the knobs of which flamed with gorgeous carbuncles, was seated in state a somewhat remarkable looking personage.

He was a man in the vigorous prime of early middle age, but small of stature, and of a meagre, yet sinewy frame, with a short neck and slightly stooping shoulders. He was meanly dressed in a rusty suit of black velvet, slashed with scarlet satin, black silk hose, and shoes bearing huge scarlet rosettes. This was Sir Arthur Chichester, the Lord Deputy, who had the distinction of being considered the ugliest man in Ireland. On his left hand stood Sir George Paulett, now gorgeous in a suit of yellow satin, with gold buttons, his moustaches curled up to his ears, and his sombre visage showing a deep-red swollen scratch across the rugged cheek, which did not improve its aspect.

On the other side of the Lord Deputy's chair sat a young lady. This was Lady O'Doherty, the newly-wedded bride of the young chieftain of Innishowen, and her brother, the gay Lord Gormanstown, a loyalist, Anglo-Irish nobleman, was one of the most conspicuous figures near the Lord Deputy's chair. Beside his fair bride, standing easily and gracefully erect, with one hand resting lightly on the back of her chair, was the young lord of the revel, Sir Cahir O'Doherty. Out of compliment to his fair bride and his viceregal guest, the young chieftain was arrayed in the English fashion; and wore a rich suit of dark blue velvet, which well set off the fine proportions of his manly form. He was conversing with the ladies and gentlemen by whom he was surrounded, now in the English, now in the Irish tongue.

"Mary, where are your twin-lilies of this north country—the Lady Una and the Lady Irene?—I do not see them here," said Lord Gormanstown, stooping towards his sister, and speaking in low, but anxious tones.

"In their rooms with their tiring-women; most like they shall be here presently," answered Lady O'Doherty; while Sir George Paulett pricked up his ears as he caught the name of Una, and turned on the young Louthian lord with a scowl of tigerish jealousy. It would have reassured him had he known that Irene, and not Una, was the object uppermost in that gay gallant's thoughts.

"And where is O'Brasil, your bonnie captain of horse, Sir Cahir?" gaily demanded a lively Scotch lassie. "I promised him a reel, when I met him on the stairs an hour ago, and foul fa, the false deceiver! he has not come to claim it!"

"I cannot tell where the unlucky cavalier may have been lagging, or dragging that misspent hour," returned O'Doherty, in the same light tone, "but wherever he hides, poor fellow! his loss is his sufficient punishment."

"How went that suit between the Bishop of Derry and Phelim Reagh M'Devitt?" suddenly demanded the Lord Deputy, his harsh, croaking voice breaking in discordantly on the gay badinage.

"Badly for poor M'Devitt," answered Sir Cahir, his bright brow clouding over; "the law, your Excellency, is a subtle spoiler, and is like to reap of our poor harvests whatever the sword may have left unshorn."

"Then M'Devitt was cast in the suit?"

"He lost the suit and his land, though the Ballibo claimed by the Bishop never was part or parcel of the Church-lands of Derry."

"Not in the old Papist days, I grant you," replied Chichester, half-closing his eyes with a deep and inscrutable smile. "So our good Bishop, if he has neither flocks nor clergy, is bent on having lands, at least? But we shall look to it, we shall look to it, O'Doherty; and if the holy man hath gathered too much into his most reverend maw, he shall disgorge it forthwith, I promise you."

Paulett's brow grew black as midnight.

"Disgorge, disgorge?" he muttered inwardly. If that game begins, where the devil will it end? I vow the old sodden-pate hath lost his wits."

"And how went the matter of Bingley of Inch against this same M'Devitt?" pursued the Deputy. "If I mistake not, it was an action for cattle stolen and driven away by this same contumacious vassal?"

"Stolen! Contumacious vassal!" echoed the chieftain, haughtily; "Phelim Reagh is a gentleman, sir, and he is my foster-father!"

"Stolen!—at least so ran the charge," broke in Sir George Paulett, "stolen, if not by him, by the roving woodkerne he keeps about him."

"Neither, sir!" retorted Sir Cahir, hotly. "The herd in question was, indeed, driven across M'Devitt's lands, but"—with a fiery glance at Paulett—"the cattle were tracked to the gate of Derry, and they could be tracked no farther."

"What mean you, sir?" faltered Paulett, his swarthy face sickening to a livid hue.

"That there are outlaws, robbers, and reavers in Derry City, whom the law hath not reached or your vigilance detected, while honest men are made to pay dearly for their depredations."

"I deny it, by Beelzebub!" blustered the Governor. "My good city of Derry shelters not a single outlaw within its walls!"

"Within your knowledge, rather," rejoined O'Doherty, good-humouredly. "Go to, Paulett! would you have us believe your newly-founded township is a community without rogues?"

"Hardly, Geordie, lad" put in the Deputy with his peculiar, wry smile. "An' if so, your city were like to thrive in this North country, like a fat buck in a poacher's pantry, or a young capon in a fox's den."

"But how went the suit, O'Doherty, against your foster-father?"

"Most foully!" replied Sir Cahir, angrily. "M'Devitt was made to pay a ruinous fine, and forced to restore to the Master of Inch—my island and castle, by-the-way, wrongfully withheld from me out of my letters patent—a vast herd of beeves that he or his people had no hand in taking."

"Bad—very bad! Your foster-father, too, and a gentleman of name!" ejaculated Chichester, with another crooked smile. "But I give you my word, sir knight, strict justice shall be done. If a wrong has been inflicted, a decision of the court shall be reversed, the fine refunded, and the herd restored."

"'Tis a mad Deputy, by all the fiends!" muttered Paulett, savagely.

"I thank your Excellency most sincerely," said Sir Cahir, earnestly, "and I trust the real miscreant shall not escape unpunished."

"And who was he?"

The strange abruptness of this question, and the deep, dissonant, braying tones in which the words were uttered, caused every eye to turn on the speaker—a person who had silently taken his place behind Sir George Paulett's elbow a few minutes before. He was a man of great stature and herculean build; with a tawny, sunburnt visage and tawny, sunburnt hands, adorned with long, red bristles.

"My good esquire, Master Richard Corbett," began Paulett. "Has your Excellency forgotten him?—and how at Dundalk, when that scurvy Irish lord refused to sell you yon piece of plate, he"—

"I remember, I remember!" interrupted the Deputy, hastily—"Corbett—Red Richard Corbett!—one must needs have a short memory to forget so tall a man." "I think you were asking who stole Bingley's cattle?" he added suddenly, and still transfixing Red Richard with a snakey and searching gaze.

"I was asking that question, your excellency," answered he, in perfectly cool and insolent tones, "—but Sir Cahir O'Doherty has joined the dance; there is no one here to answer me."

The Deputy looked around, and found that Sir Cahir O'Doherty and his lady, as well as all the officers and nobles who had lately surrounded his chair, had joined the Rincead-fada, or a long dance; just then forming, with the exception only of Sir George Paulett.

Chichester sat silent for a few minutes, his keen half-closed eyes travelling slowly around the brilliant room, and making furtive voyages from the graceful person of the youthful master to the costly adornments of his splendid hall.

"This young chieftain ruffles it bravely in the halls of his fathers," he said at length, in a low tone to the Governor of Derry. "Beshrew me, he spreads a banquet and makes a revel my royal master himself might envy!" "And this young chief is rich, say you." "Ay, as a diamond-mine! His mother, the daughter of Shane O'Neill, had for her dowry a thousand herds and a waggon-load of gold."

"Then his income—the revenue from his lands?" pursued Chichester, with a purring contentment of tone, as if he were conniving over his own particular gains.

"Oh, it must be handsome, since without Inch and Culmore, which, with their lands, castles, and fishings, are withheld from him by your secret orders"—

"Hush-sh ! speak not so glibly of my secret orders !" interrupted Chichester darkly, "I have promised the young fool, to-night, that all these shall be restored to him."

"Beshrew me, yes!" said Paulett, with increasing chagrin and bitterness, "whilst I, the King's Constable of Derry, must content me with a beggarly stipend of fifty-four pounds fifteen and fourpence per annum, from my captaincy—a poor pittance, by heaven ! for a liege man, while this proud, young springald of a traitor stock spends his gold nobles by the sackful."

"Bah !" ejaculated the Deputy, with supreme contempt, "Paulett, thou art a numbskull, as well as a knave. Listen !" he added, lowering his voice, "bend me thine ear, gossip governor, and mark well what I say to thee."

Paulett bent until his swarthy cheek nearly touched the pinched and snarling lips of the Lord Deputy, who whispered a few quick and vehement sentences into his ear. Then the knight of Derry straightened his burly figure, and nodded his head several times, while a dark glow overspread his sombre countenance, and his wolfish eyes snapped and flashed exultantly.

"Good !" he ejaculated, in tones bursting with suppressed exultation, "I wanted but the cue. Now, by Beelzebub ! I shall brew him a hell's posset, else trust me never !"

"Even let it boil over, and leave his dish empty," said Chichester, grimly, "and that day may see thee lord of Innishowen from Derry to Malin, from Lough Foyle to Lough Swilly. But whom have we here ?" added the Deputy, with lively interest, as through the velvet-curtained archway, at the lower end of the hall, there entered old Bryan MacLaughlin, of Carngall, towering erect, like a grey rock between two graceful rose trees, with his beautiful daughter on one side, and his foster-child on the other.

"Ah ! MacLaughlin and his daughter," continued Chichester, "by my sooth, governor, I commend your taste !—but the dark maiden—she with the gold lunette above her jet-black hair—who is she, Paulett—eh, who is she ?"

Chapter 4.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT—IRENE'S TRIAL.

After Shiel O'Brasil had left Una in the arms of her foster-sister, as soon as the fair girl's agitation had sufficiently subsided, she summoned her attendant and ordered her to dress her for the ball.

When Una entered the ballroom she was arrayed in a long-trained gown of pale sea-green silk, with a soft, rich scarf of delicate Flanders lace, caught on one white shoulder by a curiously wrought brooch of gold. A spiral girdle of gold confined her waist; another of the same antique pattern encircled her hair; which, with the exception of one massy and shining braid coiled high on her graceful head, fell in a glittering shower, almost to her feet. The two girls entered the ball-room, under the escort of the stately old chieftain of Carn gall.

The chieftain himself, as he walked slowly up the great hall towards the Lord Deputy's chair, with his white head, white beard, and towering form; his haughty brow, and keen, blue eye undimmed by age; in a suit of fine dark cloth with silver borders; his claret-coloured cloak fastened by an antique silver bodkin reaching across his bosom from shoulder to shoulder, presented a singular and striking figure.

Irene Magennis, who walked on his left hand, was arrayed in a trailing robe of shimmering amber satin; her blue-black hair was coiled high around her small graceful head; and a lunette of gold stood, coronet-wise, above its glossy waves; this, with a golden band encircling her round, satin-smooth arm, above the left elbow, formed her only ornament.

Irene raised her dark eyes as she entered the ball-room, and gave one calm, comprehensive glance around. She saw the sinister eyes of the Lord Deputy fixed upon her at the moment when he eagerly inquired of Sir George Paulett who was the dark maiden with the gold lunette above her glossy hair. Then her glance caught the bride and bridegroom, as they gaily led the Rincead-fada. She saw, as in a dream, a glistening cloud of pearly satin and silver sheen floating serenely between her and the lofty form of Sir Cahir. A long in-drawn breath swelled her bosom; her dark lashes fell, and she saw no more.

The old chieftain immediately brought his fair charges to pay their respects to the Lord Deputy; and just as Una reached the dais, and the ugly viceroy, advancing three steps, bent low over her beautiful and jewelled hand, Shiel O'Brasil entered the hall. He raised his eyes towards the dais, and he saw Una MacLaughlin standing there under its fringed canopy, the centre and cynosure of every eye, clothed like a very princess, and bearing herself as one.

The transformation seemed almost too great for belief; and poor O'Brasil, oppressed by an exaggerated sense of his own poverty and obscurity, felt his heart sink utterly, as he contemplated the immeasurable distance which wealth and birth and beauty had placed between him and the object of his adoration. Step by step he had drawn close to the dais, impelled by the irresistible fascination of Una's beauty; but as he reached its foot, his courage wholly deserted him, and inly cursing his wretched fate, he was turning to leave the hall, when a gently detaining hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Whither now, O'Brasil?" said Irene Magennis, in her low, silvery tones, "and where are you betaking yourself without a word to one of us—in that handsome velvet tunic, too, and embroidered belt?"

"Anywhere!" answered O'Brasil, gloomily—"back to the rude air of the battlements, which befit me better than the perfumed atmosphere of the ballroom. What errand can such as I have here?"

"Courage!" whispered Irene. "Remember a golden zone and a jewelled clasp may confine a woman's gown, but cannot hold her heart. Courage, captain, your rival is in the field!"

O'Brasil looked up with a lightning glance, and met a triumphant and mocking smile from the Governor of Derry, as he dexterously placed himself between MacLaughlin and his daughter; and ignoring the episode of the chamber window, which he well knew Una dared not mention to her father, he audaciously commenced an animated conversation with both, plying the fair girl with fulsome flatteries as he bent with wolfish gaze over her snowy shoulder. Paulett lifted his red eyes now and again to dart a maddening glance of exultation at his handsome rival; and the looks of wrath and fury which the young soldier lavishly repaid him were as balsam to the savage soul of the jealous governor.

Paulett, however, was no great conversationalist, and his stock of commonplaces was soon exhausted. He found himself presently at the end of his eloquence and the end of his wits together. Una remained persistently silent; the old chieftain began to fidget; the governor had one resource left—a hateful one to him—but in despair of losing his advantage, he dashed at it headlong.

He had long ago found out Bryan MacLaughlin's one weak point, and practised on it to his own advantage. Now, adopting his usual tactics, and hoping thereby to commend himself to the father and at the same time detain the daughter in conversation, he asked the old man's opinion on some question of Irish genealogy.

At once the delighted chieftain mounted on his favourite hobby and proceeded to ride it fast and furiously. His old eyes flashed and scintillated; his bland brow expanded, every wrinkle vanishing like magic; he seized Paulett by one of his gold buttons, and gently but forcibly drew him aside, quite out of the crush that surrounded his two fair girls.

The enterprising Governor saw that he had played his trump card and lost, and began to feel something more than dismayed. Looking over the old chieftain's shoulder, he saw Shiel O'Brasil taking the place by Una's side that he had just surrendered; he saw his dark head and smiling lips close to her golden hair; he saw the delicate colour flushing on her lovely cheek, and her violet eyes drooping beneath his gaze, with the sweet love light under their silken lashes. In that moment, Sir George Paulett suffered all the torment of a soul condemned.

But the climax of the Governor's rage and torture arrived when

he saw Shiel O'Brasil lead out Una to the dance from amid a crowd of jealous and disappointed gallants. And when O'Brasil's dark eye sought his for an instant, with a glance of smiling pity, as he turned to hand his beautiful partner down the steps of the dais, the sombre face of Paulett sickened to a corpse-like hue, and his red eyes strained from their sockets as if he were strangling.

Meanwhile Lady O'Doherty stood up to dance with O'Hanlon of Orior, a gay and handsome young fellow, just lately wedded to Sir Cahir's sister; and the chieftain himself made his way to Irene Magennis.

Irene was sitting still where she had first found a chair—sitting with drooping lids and hands loosely linked, the long straight folds of her amber satin trailing about her lissom figure, and her dusky lashes nearly touching her olive cheeks, listening, or seeming to listen, though almost in silence, to an emulous cross-fire of compliments and pretty speeches, from the Deputy on one hand and Lord Gormanstown on the other. Wondrously beautiful Irene looked at that moment, with the new, sweet, lovely light and colour transfiguring all her face.

"Wondrously beautiful!" So thought Sir Arthur Chichester, as with an evil glance in his prying eyes and an evil thought taking shape in his treacherous soul, his stealthy gaze followed the soft rose-flush as it stole along her delicate neck and bosom, tinting them like the faint pink lining of some exquisite sea-shell.

"Wondrously beautiful!" thought Lord Gormanstown; a thrill of honest and real feeling mantling his brow, and making his tongue falter and fail in the middle of a sentence he was speaking.

"Wondrously beautiful!" So thought Sir Cahir, as he gazed down at her from his stately height, a host of sunny memories, visions, pictures, dreams of happy bygone days, rushing over his thoughts, like summer wind over the strings of an Æolian harp, awakening strange, sweet symphonies, with a soft cord of sadness thrilling through them all.

"Rene, the dance is forming. Will you be my partner for this fandango?"

Irene made no reply, but an electric thrill ran through all her frame as the young chieftain took her hand in his, saying gently: "Come, Rene, dun, if you are not engaged, give me this dance—for old times—you know there is no one treads a Spanish measure

like you."

"Rene dun!" It was the old, familiar pet name by which O'Doherty had always addressed her in the days of their constant and friendly intercourse—days, alas for her! when Irene had learned to love the young and gallant chief with all the strength and ardour of her deep and impassioned nature.

With what sore agony of shame and sorrow; what bitter self-scorn and self-upbraiding; what daily and nightly vigils of tears and prayers and penances, Irene had striven to rend the feeling from her pure heart, after she became aware of Sir Cahir's marriage, God and his recording angels only knew! And she thought, she hoped, poor girl! and believed, that she had succeeded. But love comes not to order, and goes not at command; and Irene Magennis had counted too much on her controlling power.

Sir Cahir O'Doherty stood before her, holding her hand in his, with the old chivalrous and devoted air; speaking to her in the old, well-remembered tones; looking down at her with the old, smiling, never-to-be-forgotten glance—that glance which had power to move her inmost soul—no coldness, no constraint, neither any shade or shadow of undue familiarity, nothing in touch or look or tone to help her to resist him, and all the old, warm, wild love which she had thought, not, indeed, uprooted, but duly suppressed and under proper control, flamed up in her heart and rushed into her eyes. For one agonised moment the young girl sat thus, love shining in her dark eyes, trembling on her sweet lips, lightening on her crimson cheeks and throbbing bosom—sat thus, with the guarded secret of her soul beaming and breathing from every feature.

Sir Cahir saw her involuntary agitation, but he had too little vanity to divine its cause. He saw, too, the wondering stare of Lord Gormanstown, and the keen, cunning eyes of the crafty Deputy bent curiously upon her; and unwilling that the gaze of strangers should pry too closely into the sources of his fair friend's emotion, he raised her gently, drawing her trembling hand within his arm, and said:

"Come, Rene, our places in the dance will soon be filled. Or shall we rather take a turn around the room—the heat here is something oppressive?"

Irene heard him as in a dream. She had not been prepared for

this ordeal—her heart had taken her by surprise. She had believed firmly that her strength, her pride, her purity, above all, her prayers, should prove an all-sufficient guard and bulwark against the promptings of her weaker self—the pleadings of her unhappy love. Now, amid the wild tumult that possessed her, standing there with burning cheeks and beating breast, every nerve and fibre thrilling with uncontrollable emotion, she was conscious of only one feeling—she must get away from Sir Cahir. She must escape—fly ! somewhere—anywhere—or oh, unutterable shame and horror ! she should betray herself !

Oh, why had she refused Lord Gormanstown, when he asked—begged her to dance with him !

She felt that if she pleaded fatigue, Sir Cahir would sit out the dance by her side, talking—talking, perhaps, of those dear old times, the memory of which made her solace and her anguish, the bare mention of which—by him—had swept away, in one wild wave, the whole fabric of her self-control, built through many a dark, dark hour, with such pain and penance and tribulation.

What should she do ? Where could she fly ?

For one wild moment, yielding to the glamour of his touch, his voice, his eye, she let her hand rest within the clasp of him she loved; she let him draw her gently forward; they turned and went down one step of the dais side by side. They went down one step. Then Irene stopped abruptly; a shudder shook her slender form from head to foot; she drew her arm suddenly from that of her companion and put her hand to her burning brow for a second as if to collect her thoughts.

“Pardon me, Sir Cahir,” she said, in low, uncertain tones, “but”—turning to the Deputy with a half-despairing, half-defiant flash in her dusky eyes—“Sir Arthur Chichester, did I not promise to give this dance to you ?”

“Me ?” cried the little Deputy, springing to his feet with a look of blank amazement. “No—that is—to be sure—oh, to be sure !” he added hastily and a little confusedly, his pinched features flushing all over with unwonted pleasure, and his wry mouth expanding in his blandest, falsest smile. “A hundred thousand pardons, dear lady,” he went on effusively, “Permit me the divine, the exquisite pleasure now, which, God wot, I hardly deserve, for my churlish and unpardonable stupidity—and blindness !” he added in a mean-

ing whisper, which, however, Irene was too wildly agitated either to notice or understand. And with an elaborate bow, which had the effect of displaying all the knotted joints and gnarls of his singular and misshaped figure, the Deputy took the fair girl from Sir Cahir's side and led her to the dance.

Poor Irene ! she had escaped from one danger only to stumble on another. She had escaped, as she thought, unhurt; but the proud maiden little dreamt what a price she should have to pay for her momentary loss of self-control.

"Wonder of wonders !" ejaculated Una MacLaughlin, softly—"the Lord Deputy dancing—and with Irene !"

"I'll drop in my tracks : " whispered O'Hanlon of Orior, making comical and desperate efforts to contain his laughter, as he came vis-a-vis with Una and O'Brasil. "For heaven's sake, look at Shawn-na-Cobberigh capering before Irene Magennis like a bunch of knotty sticks half thrust into a velvet jerkin."

"Or like a bog-imp hopping a frog's hornpipe on the prongs of a moss-oak stump," rejoined O'Brasil, merrily.

"Dhia ! watch the fling of his little spindle-shanks," cried O'Hanlon, "don't you hear them crackling, like dried brushwood, in his old, rusty hose ?"

"What the deil's come owre the deil that he's taen to dance ?" breathed a gay young Scot into O'Brasil's ear, flaunting his dark-green tartans as he passed gracefully on, with rhythmic and measured step.

"Don't !" gasped Una, nearly choking with suppressed laughter—"don't look at him—don't look at me. I see him figuring in your very eyes—there ! I'm out of time; I'm off my step; I'm dancing Shawn-na-Cobberigh—I know I am !"

"They're laughing at you, these Irish churls," whispered a tall officer, as he passed the Deputy; volunteering his information, not out of any love he bore Chichester, but, on the contrary, for the pleasure of saying something galling—"they're laughing at your Excellency's dancing."

"Let them !" returned Chichester, ferociously, "let them, by — ! for every laugh they have at my expense I'll quaff a cup of blood, one day, at theirs !"

It was a dreadful speech; but Chichester meant it in his heart of hearts. It was a dreadful oath; but Chichester kept it to the

very letter.

Meanwhile, Sir Cahir stood still where Irene had left him, a good deal surprised, and just a little chagrined at his fair friend's sudden desertion. "Irene engaged to the little Lord Deputy" he muttered, with a half-smile; "and he to forget it! Rene dun—Rene dhas, since his memory was so defective, surely yours need not have been quite so accurate. I thought I was something of a favourite with Irene, too. Why did she desert me so? Well-a-day! to his last hour will a man comprehend a woman?"

Chapter 5.

O'DOHERTY PLEADS ANOTHER'S CAUSE—CHICHESTER PLEADS HIS OWN.

The ball was over, and Una and Irene, side by side, were treading the long passage leading to their rooms.

Una with the lovelight in her violet eyes, and the lovehue on her glowing cheeks, still seemed to tread on air; but the moment the blaze of the ballroom was left behind, Irene seemed to have collapsed utterly.

"What a night this has been!" cried the gold-haired beauty, throwing one large, white arm around the foster-sister's waist and nestling her bright head on her shoulder as they moved along—"triumph for you, for me, Shiel—and despite everything, how happy we have all been! "Irene, you have no idea how lovely you were to-night—oh, you surpassed yourself! Your dark eyes shone like stars; your cheeks glowed like dusk-red roses; the clear ring of your laugh, so fresh, so wild, so joyous! it reminded me of—what?—the rush of the small, silvery wavelets, when they crowd in, and glance and break in crystal spray on the pebbly beach—there! was not that well said? Never again assume that you alone have the gift of poetry!

"There was something new in your voice and look and laugh to-night—something brilliant, bewitching, tantalising—Irene, what was it?"

"Heaven only knows!" answered the dark maiden, in a low, tense tone.

"Well, Rene, you were not yourself to-night, but a different creature—your ego, your double, as it were, playing a piquant part outside your other staid and sober self. You were a coquette to-night, Rene, of the first order."

"Was I?" said Irene, apathetically.

"Sly puss! as if you did not know it, and half the men in the ballroom off their heads about you!"

"I did not know it," answered the young girl, dully; "I had to do something, you know, to—to—but what can it matter?"

"Only this, Irene, you stooped to conquer, and your new dominion may prove hard to rule. Why, all the night that horrid little Deputy never lifted his gaze off you; from the moment you entered the ballroom his hateful, half-shut eyes followed you wherever you went with such a look as—well, if he were not a married man, I should say the little wretch was over head and ears in"—

"Una!" cried Irene, sharply, "Una!"

"Well, there! I shall not talk about him; he is the most worthless and the least pleasant of all possible subjects. But poor Lord Gormanstown—his is a hopeless case. Poor fellow, I heard him pleading, oh! so earnestly, with Sir Cahir to say a word to you in his behalf. After all, Rene, he is a gay and gallant cavalier; and though an Anglo-Irishman, you might"—

Una's sentence was cut short at this point by the sudden opening of a door beside them, and the appearance of Sir Cahir O'Doherty standing within it, with a slightly perplexed look on his open and handsome countenance.

"Irene," he said gently, "can I have a minute's conversation with you, alone?"

"What did I tell you?" whispered Una, pressing her foster-sister's arm, and then gliding away, with a smiling nod to Sir Cahir, before Irene could utter a word to detain her.

The dark maiden flushed scarlet, and then grew pale to the lips.

"I am very tired," she faltered. "Will it not do to-morrow?"

"My client is afraid that to-morrow may be too late," answered the chieftain, with a smile. "He fears that someone else—but pray forgive my insistence. Come in here and sit down for just one minute."

He held the door open, and Irene, whose very soul obeyed his slightest look, could refuse or resist no longer. She passed into

the room, and seated herself on a low chair in its dimmest corner.

"I was slow to undertake this task," began the young chieftain, with gentle seriousness, "and I have not undertaken it without due consideration, because there are few, indeed, whom I could esteem worthy of Irene Magennis."

Irene made a hasty gesture of dissent, entreaty, protest; but O'Doherty continued:—

"There is one who has begged and prayed me to speak a word for him to my little friend—one who so deeply and truly loves you; who is waiting, even now, with such trembling impatience, in such a passion of hope and fear as your gentle breast never could conceive—waiting for a breath of hope from your lips, that I consented, at last, to become the bearer of his petition, and"—

"Hush-sh!" cried Irene, huskily, "this—this is too much!" And she sprang to her feet and glided towards the door.

O'Doherty gently interposed himself between her and it.

"One word, Rene dun—one word, dear Rene," he said, appealingly, "Lord Gormanstown—what shall I say to him? Can you give him one word of hope, it is all he asks?"

The young girl stopped before him, her fair, slender hands pressed on her heaving bosom. Her lips moved—twitched convulsively—but for a full minute no sound came from them. She looked at Sir Cahir, and the dumb agony of death was in her dusk eyes.

"Tell him," she said, at length, in a cold, constrained tone—"tell him I have no heart to give. I can never love him. There is no hope."

"Have I hurt you, Irene?" said O'Doherty, taking her hand in his, and speaking in troubled tones. "I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Irene only shook her head in silence, and snatching away her hand, moved towards the door once more.

"What is it, Rene dun?" said O'Doherty, anxiously, as he opened the door for her with lingering motion. "Twice to-night, I fear, I have unintentionally hurt or wounded you. Oh, believe me, I meant it not. Say you forgive me."

Irene looked up with a little quivering smile; she would have had it brave and bright, but it was sadder far than tears.

"I forgive you, Sir Cahir?" she replied simply. "There is nothing to forgive."

She raised her dark eyes to his for a moment as she passed out, with a look in their dusk-bright depths the young chieftain never forgot; and then, before he had time for another word or even glance, she was gone.

She flew, like a night-bird, along the lofty, oak-roofed, tapestried hall-way, and passing the door of her own chamber within which Una was waiting for her, turned into a narrower and darker passage, and thence up a winding flight of stone stairs, dimly lighted at every landing by a smoky oil-lamp—up and up until she paused before a narrow, pointed, oaken door let into the thick wall, and giving entrance to a turret-chamber on the sixth story.

“At last! at last!” cried Irene, with a tearless sob, as she sank on her knees and clasped her fair hands above her head. “God pity me, and help me to bear it!” she went on, in a kind of low, wailing whisper, but which sounded terribly distinct in the narrow and silent cell. “Oh, Cahir, my love! my love! surely this last cruel blow you might have spared me! My God, give me strength to suffer, strength to suffer!” she prayed again and again—“Strength to suffer—I ask no more!”

“Why not ask for vengeance?”

This startling question was uttered in deep and abrupt tones, so near to Irene that she felt the hot breath which conveyed the words wafting across her bowed forehead. She uttered no word, no cry; she could not. She felt as if a two-edged sword had just transfixed her heart. But she raised her eyes, in which the look of death was still lingering and saw before her the freakish figure of the Lord Deputy.

His huge, black head was thrust eagerly forward; his leering, half-shut eyes searched her face with an intent and burning gaze. “I have seen and heard all, sweet Irene,” he said, smoothly. “See, I was standing in yon window-niche when you entered—Paulett is waiting for me at the tower-head; but, I, too, wanted to rest, and think.”

Irene neither spoke nor moved; only her great, dusky, wide-open eyes, with the same dull, dead agony in them, continued to stare straight at him, as if the face she looked on were that of some horrible Medusa that had, at the first glance, transformed her into stone. He—this wretch whom she feared and detested—had discovered her secret. Her proud heart, quivering in all its agony of

abasement, lay bare beneath his insolent gaze. Death itself would have been a mild and gentle pain, to the proud daughter of Magennis, compared to this.

"Irene, my beautiful," continued Chichester, "Why do you not ask for vengeance—vengeance on this scornful chief who has humbled you, and made you suffer—vengeance on the haughty dame who has supplanted you in his affections?"

Still there was no reply from the kneeling maiden; no movement of limb, or lip, or fixed, wide-open eye.

"Listen, daughter of Magennis," pursued the Deputy, "would you be avenged, I say, on this haughty youngster? Would you make him suffer as you have suffered—answer me, would you?"

Irene answered nothing; she had not yet recovered her faculties; and the sound of the Deputy's voice bore no meaning to her stunned ear.

"Ah, I know you would," proceeded Chichester, "your silence tells me it is so! Sweet Irene, would you like to be lady and mistress of all Innishowen; to queen it over sixteen brave, border castles, with an army of vassals and servitors at your command; to rule over a hundred hills and headlands; a hundred fertile valleys and fishful streams, even from Lough Foyle to Lough Swilly; from the bens of Ardmalin to the bogs of Templemore? Speak, Irene Magennis, would you crush those who have crushed you? Would you reign in their ruin? Would you be the loved and lovely mistress of all this fair and fruitful territory?"

Chichester bent down as he concluded, and taking Irene's passive hand in his, pressed it against his bosom.

"I—how—what territory?" muttered Irene, starting and shivering at Chichester's touch. With an awakening thrill of indignation, the young girl snatched her hand away from the contact of his cold, clammy fingers; and the action partially recalled her to herself.

"The territory of Innishowen," replied Chichester, eagerly, "which may be virtually yours if you consent to love the man who will one day be its lord."

"And that man?" said Irene, slowly.

She rose from her knees as she spoke; the living lustre again flashing into her wide, dark eyes, which still remained fixed on Chichester's face.

"That man stands before you."

"You?" she cried, catching her breath, sharply, "You, lord of O'Doherty's ancient patrimony—you!—impossible!"

"There is nothing impossible to Chichester."

"Will the king permit you to deprive O'Doherty?"

"The king," laughed Chichester, "hath a kingly conscience."

"And yours?"

"Is a viceregal one?"

"How—in what way?"

"In every way; but especially in matters Irish. Look not so coldly on me, lovely Irene. Put your doubts aside. I am ten times more powerful than the king, my master—master, quotha I—who sits trembling and obedient on his new-found throne, and hurls the thunderbolts his ministers have made for him; while I forge my own, and launch them at my pleasure."

"Then about Inishowen?" questioned Irene, calmly.

"Nay, God wot, I have said enough," answered Chichester, with his cunning smile; "be mine, be mine, love-bird, and you shall know all the rest. Be mine, and you shall set your fair foot on the necks of your enemies; you shall have all a woman need wish for—wealth and love, power and splendour, enough to make the proudest dame in England pale with envy. Fly with me to-morrow; I have a castle far from here, where you shall reign as a very queen. And when this poisonous stock hath been rooted out of these Northern vales, you, lovely Irene, shall be mistress in their stead. You love me, do you not, sweet maiden?" proceeded he, as, misconstruing Irene's silence, and the serenity with which she had seemed to listen to his base proposals, Chichester sank on one knee before her, while an eager flush mantled his swarthy visage, and his small, sinister eyes glittered with anticipated triumph.

"All night," continued he, "you showered your sweet favours upon me. Say I have not read those dark eyes wrongly—say you love me—you will be mine—you will make me happy?"

Standing before him, in the light of her fair young beauty, her delicate neck slightly bent, her shimmering amber robes trailing about her like a sunset cloud, Irene looked down from her graceful height at the kneeling figure, with its freakish knots and gnarls; its huge joints, and spindle limbs; the great, round, black head, the evil eyes, the wry mouth, and square, cruel jaw; the whole

features now darkly flushed, and wearing their vilest and most hateful expression—she looked down at him for a single instant, listening to his croaking voice beseeching her to love him—him!--this creature in all his ugliness and meanness; his complaisant villainy and cool audacity, and for an answer—she could form no other—a little maddening peal of mocking laughter—wildly musical, wildly mocking, burst from her scarlet lips.

Again and again the dark, lustrous eyes scanned him up and down, over and over, until the little, ugly wretch fairly writhed and quivered beneath her laughing glance; and again and again the musical, maddening, mocking peal rang from her lovely lips. It was a moment of triumph and a moment of vengeance for the maiden who had been so grossly, so unforgiveably, insulted. In no other way could she have touched so keenly, stung so deeply, the little, venomous soul of the man before her; and Chichester, who would not have quailed before a charge of pikes, squirmed and wriggled like a wounded reptile under a girl's dark eyes; while the sweet, wild laughter still pealed from her coral lips, and every luminous glance seemed to seek out and transfix with its mocking ray some ridiculous freak or deformity of his face or person.

Then Irene turned from him, and with another burst of laughter, more musical, more scornful, more maddening than before, she swept across the turret-room towards the door.

Irene put her hand on the doorkey; but despite the wonderful strength and self-control that had come to her in her hour of need, her slender fingers fluttered, like leaves, as she strove to grasp and turn it. In a moment Chichester had brushed her hand aside, and inserted his little, gnarled frame between her and the oaken door.

"You have triumphed," he said, in low, venomous tone, while he transfixed the fair girl with his small glittering eyes, in which rage, hate, disappointed passion, and a hundred evil feelings were struggling for expression—"you have triumphed over Chichester!"

"Poor Chichester!" said Irene, with another flash of her white teeth, and another ripple of silvery laughter.

"And are you going to tell O'Doherty?"

"Everything!"

"Go, then; tell him all. I, also, have a tale to tell."

Something in the smooth, deadly malignity of Chichester's tone

made Irene start involuntarily and look at him, as she put out her hand once more to grasp the key.

"Would you like to know what I have to say to him?" continued he, "would you, my dainty damsel?"

"No; for whatever you might say, it would be false and wicked."

"Wrong for once, pretty one. But hear me, and judge for yourself. I should simply tell him, first, that you deliberately asked me to dance with you to-night. Secondly, you flirted desperately with me all the night; you danced with me as often as I asked you; everyone else heard the pretty speeches I addressed to you, if you did not. Thirdly, I shall tell him that you followed me here to this lonely turret—in the dead of night—when all others were abed—and that you have remained with me here for an hour or more, with locked and closed doors; while your foster-sister awaits you in your chamber; and Paulett tarries for me on the next landing, and can easily be made an eye-witness of your presence here."

"Let me go!" said Irene, faintly, as all the horror of her situation flashed upon her. "Wretch! stand aside and let me pass!"

"Oh, certainly!—and you shall tell the chieftain all. But what will you say, fair lady, about following me to the turret-chamber?"

Irene groaned inwardly. Until now she had not fully seen the deadly trap in which the base intriguer had fairly caught her. She maintained, however, her outward show of courage and composure.

"I will go," she said, resolutely. "I will tell him all. It means only self-sacrifice, and I were no woman if I could not compass that."

"And I am bound to tell you, lady, not one—not even the chief himself—will believe you; and the moment your lovely lips are opened to denounce me, I open mine, and your fair fame is gone."

Chichester's wry mouth twisted into its ugliest smile. "Lovely Irene, you are at my mercy. You shall be mine yet, doubt it not. Chichester only plays to win!"

He turned the key in the heavy lock, as he spoke, and opened the door stealthily, a little way. He thrust out his ugly head, put his hand to the side of his mouth, and called softly up the winding stair:

"Paulett ! Paulett ! are you there still ?"

Instantly Paulett came stamping down the stone steps, grumbling and swearing at the tardy summons; and when his dark countenance was just visible around the last downward curve of the winding-stair, the Deputy threw wide open the door of the turret-chamber, and allowed Irene to pass out.

"Good-night, lady-bird," he said, in a loud amorous whisper, "nay, never tremble, little heart, it is only my faithful Geordie. We shall have no secrets from him in days to come."

Irene flashed him a look of concentrated rage and scorn, as she swept haughtily past him. But Paulett's coarse, half-smothered laugh, and his explosive ejaculation of amazement, amusement, and inquiry, followed the proud maiden down the dark, winding stair, and set her heart and brain on fire.

Chichester had triumphed. How could she tell what she knew of him ? and she had no guarantee that he or his unscrupulous lieutenant would choose to be silent about her.

She had sounded the depth of his wickedness—his malice, his greed, his libertinism, his Judas-like treachery. But she dared not make it known to the friends who were threatened with ruin.

What should she do ? How escape from the toils the subtle wretch had entwined around her ? "Death," she thought, "death itself would not set her free, for Chichester could calumniate her even in her grave. Only one thing I can do," she resolved, at length, despairingly, "I will tell O'Doherty—I will expose his traitorous guest—in the morning I will warn him."

Then all the marvellous strength of nerve and brain and heart, which, throughout the long night of trial, had been strained to its utmost tension—strained to the point of torture at times, almost of madness, suddenly gave way. Darkness and forgetfulness came upon her; she reeled blindly forward a step or two, and sank heavily to the floor, in a death-like swoon.

Chapter 6.

GREY GRANU—IN THE OLD FORT OF AILEACH.

"At sunset in the old fort of Aileach." So Sir George Paulett had said, when he had been interrupted in his murderous attack on Shiel O'Brasil, and reluctantly obliged to put up his weapon.

At sunset, and alone !

O'Brasil had been too much excited at the moment to notice these rather strange conditions; and even when the all-important hour drew near, he had not given the matter a single uneasy thought. Brave as a lion, a skilful swordsman, and burning with fierce anger against the rude enemy who had insulted him, and taken him at such unfair advantage, he had no feeling in his heart or mind save one of intense eagerness for the coming contest—for the moment he should measure swords in fair fight with his brutal and hated rival.

The night of the ball had been succeeded by a day of mild splendour. The sun was now dipping down towards the western highlands; the sky was blue as a sapphire; the water glittered like gold.

It was six miles from Buncrana Castle to the old dun of Aileach on Grianan Hill, and O'Brasil had resolved to go to the trysting-place by water; partly because he loved the sea—the mysterious sea, that had swallowed up his history but spared the flickering lamp of his infant life—and partly to avoid interruption or inquiry.

It was a glorious evening, and a thrice glorious scene; and Shiel O'Brasil's heart beat high and his "veins ran lightning," as he

beached his boat on the shore of the narrow strait between the castled Isle of Inch and the foot-slopes of Grianan Hill, and hooking his kedge anchor into the sand, sprang ashore, and took his way towards the trysting place—the kingly old Dun of Aileach, that crowned the Hill of the Sun.

“Paulett shall not say I kept him waiting,” muttered the young soldier, as he sprang up the heathery slopes, over grey whinstone rocks, and boulders, and great crystals of quartz, that scintillated in the yellow light, like gigantic diamonds amid the dark brown heath and fern.

At the same instant a prolonged and awful cry—an indescribable shriek of mingled agony, amazement, terror, joy, he knew not what—smote upon O’Brasil’s ear, echoing far and near over the sunny and silent hill. The young man stopped suddenly in his upward course, and looked around him in startled wonder.

Directly before and above him, standing on the summit of a rocky knoll that partially obstructed his path, stood a singularly wild and striking figure. It was the figure of a woman, shrouded from head to foot in a shaggy mantle of coarse grey cloth, held by a horn bodkin across the bosom. The hood, falling partly back, exposed a face of deathlike pallor, a weird, grey face, lit by a pair of wild and mournful eyes that had once been blue, but whose azure lustre had long died out, and framed in loose-falling grey hair, whose uncared locks streamed about her like a ragged winter cloud.

The face was old—how old it would be impossible to determine; but at that moment the wild and eager light that flashed from her faded eyes transfigured the worn and woeful features, imparting to them an almost youthful appearance, and revivifying the lineaments of a long-lost beauty that might once have been brilliant indeed; as, with lips apart, eyes distended, thin hands outstretched, as if in sanguine hope, and body crouching backward, as if ready to sink with fear, the cloaked woman stood motionless on the rocky height, her pale, sharp lips still trembling with the piercing cry that had just issued from them, and gazed downward at O’Brasil with a strange, thrilling eloquence of expression and attitude, indescribable, as it was incomprehensible.

“You have come!” she cried, in tones still vibrating between joy and terror, “at last, at last, you have come!”

"I have, indeed, come," answered O'Brasil, a good deal startled by this strange address, and supposing it to have reference to the recontre he had on hand, "I have come, and methinks in good time. But how in heaven's name, woman, did it become known to you that I should be here."

"Oh, have I not watched for you through the long years?" wailed the grey woman—"have I not watched and waited for you in darkness of soul and in woe? Morning and evening I have seen you before me, and always in anger and wrath."

The strange woman stopped breathless and gasping, after pouring forth this half-frantic rhapsody.

"You are a stranger to me, woman," said O'Brasil. "I have never seen you before."

"Who are you?" she faltered. "Mother of God! who—who are you, and what do you here?"

"I am Shiel O'Brasil, Sir Cahir O'Doherty's captain of horse. With my errand here you can have no concern."

As O'Brasil spoke, the eager light died out of the woman's eyes, and her face resumed its oldest, greyest look.

"It was your eyes, your lips, your hair," she wailed, with a dull, tearless sob in every tone, "your look of wild anger, your step and voice of wrath! You came upon me, O, youth, like the vision of my life-long dream and dole. But heed me not. I was wild; I knew not what I said; the dreams that gather about me may have made me mad. Think no more of me—do not speak of what you have seen or heard—pity me, I am a woman of woe!"

Something in the woman's despairing and desolate look and attitude touched a quick chord in O'Brasil's generous heart. Involuntarily, he bent his graceful head, and a gentle light came into his dark eyes, and a pitying softness into his voice, as he replied:—

"I am truly sorry for you. Have no fears that I will injure you. If I can help you, unhappy woman, let me know; and so far as a poor soldier can, it shall be done—if I survive," he added, with his proud and careless smile.

"What?" exclaimed Grey Granu, sharply, "whither then, are you going? on what errand are you bent?"

"I am bound for the dun of Aileach," answered the youth, "and already have I tarried here too long."

“Turn back !” cried the grey woman, vehemently, “wolves and serpents have gone there before you !”

“Nay, turn I will not,” answered O’Brasil laughing, “were I sure of meeting all the wolves in the woods of Kinneweer, and all the serpents St. Patrick ever banished.”

“You shall meet worse than these, young warrior—worse a hundredfold !”

“I hope so,” returned O’Brasil, lightly; “and, God willing, whom I meet, I conquer.”

With these words O’Brasil turned once more from the strange woman, and with rapid step pursued his course up the mountain side.

“Beware, O son of the Gael !” called Grey Granu after him, in solemn and prophetic tones. “Your fate is written—beware the Sassum dearga !—I say, beware !—beware !”

The woman’s wild and mournful cries followed him, like the dirge of a keener, far up the heath-clad steep; and as O’Brasil listened an involuntary chill ran through his throbbing veins, as if the breath of an icy wind had stricken him through; and with an impatient, half-angry, half-uneasy exclamation, he put aside the unwelcome sensation, and vexed at the delay he had encountered, quickened his pace, and dashed onward at his utmost speed.

Presently he found himself on the ancient road, leading up the brown hillside to the ancient fort—a road whose broad paving-stones were put down by Irish hands long before the Roman Way had furrowed the lands of Britain.

With a swift step O’Brasil ascended the moss-grown way, passing through five concentric ramparts of earth and stone that enclosed the royal hill from base to apex, and soon reached its highest pinnacle, and stood before the doorway of the dun of Aileach. When he reached the low square doorway, he glanced around sharply, but saw no one; then bending his head, while his eagle-feather brushed the rude, stone lintel, he passed the venerable portal, and stood within the circular, grass-grown court.

He again gazed eagerly around, searching keenly the masses of fallen stones, and the tangled clumps of fern and wild briar, amid which the long shadows and dusk-gold lights of sunset were already beginning to fade.

But Paulett was not there.

"First on the ground, by heaven, after all!" ejaculated the young man, in a tone of satisfaction. "Now let me ascend the cashel, and look out for the doughty knight; he cannot approach within a mile, by land or sea, but I shall espy his coming."

A succession of terraces ran around the interior face of the wall, which were reached by regular, sloping stone steps, leading from one to another. O'Brasil instantly clambered up these steps, which, though choked in many places by fallen stones, were still accessible, and gaining the top platform, at the highest point of the wall, proceeded to search all the brown mountain with an eagle glance. But as yet, his expected antagonist was nowhere visible.

At that moment a sound, which was not by any means a voice from the dead past, broke suddenly in on O'Brasil. It was the loud lowing of a herd which had been driven along the mountain-foot by a tall cowboy, bearing a long ash-plant "crook," and aided by a rough wolfdog. The herd, or "creaght," had, however, broken loose from its keeper's control, and was now galloping up the ancient road, pursued by both man and dog.

O'Brasil watched them for a few moments as they forged up the brown hillside, with the cowboy at their heels, a tall, loose-limbed, tow-headed mountaineer, who looked able to outrun a north wind, on the stretch. O'Brasil recognized the youth as Gilla M'Teg, or as he was more generally styled, "Gilla-na-bo"—that is Gilla of the cows, the herdsman of M'Sweeney Doe, on the far northern coast. He noted the splendid action of the young mountaineer for a few moments with silent appreciation.

"Bravo, Gilla-na-bo!" he exclaimed aloud, then, "You have the lighest heel from this to the Rock of Doe!"

At that instant a slight sound from below—a step or a falling stone—withdrew his attention from the motions of the herdsman, and brought him back abruptly to a more absorbing subject.

He turned and gazed eagerly down into the circular area, where the shadows of twilight were already deepening among the piles of fallen masonry, and the tangles of fern and bramble; and there, sure enough, towering aloft amid the gathering gloom, stood a tall figure cased in iron mail.

"Paulett, by heaven!" muttered O'Brasil, his white teeth suddenly clenching like a vice, and his dark eye flashed wildly.

In a few bounding steps he reached the bottom of the terraced

wall, and advanced on his hated enemy, sword in hand.

"You have broken tryst, Knight of Derry," he began, looking at the man before him with a glance of fire. "Your courage or your cause are surely backward, that you come so late in their vindication."

His antagonist vouchsafed no reply; but clearing his throat with a short, dry cough, he backed slowly towards the cashel wall, O'Brasil following closely.

"Draw, dog, and defend yourself!" cried the young man, fiercely—"draw, or I am through you!"

The other placed his hand on a long horse-pistol with which his belt was garnished; but continued to back towards the wall, emitting all the while the same sharp, peculiar cough.

O'Brasil's suspicions were fully aroused by this strange course of action, as well as by some peculiarities which he thought he perceived in the contour and carriage of the mailed figure before him. He carried no firearms, but holding his sword on guard, and ready to spring on his antagonist the moment he should attempt to move the pistol, he bent forward, looking keenly at his silent enemy through the gathering shadows.

His visor was closed, but behind its iron bars he caught the yellow gleam of a pair of widely-parted eyes, and through the jointed cheek plates of the helmet, a few bristling red hairs protruded fiercely.

O'Brasil's heart beat quickly. This man was not Paulett, but his ruffianly esquire and swashbuckler, Red Richard Corbett; and Paulett was to have met him there alone.

"Corbett!" ejaculated the young man, in tones quivering with wrath and scorn, "Sirrah, where is your coward master? What do you here?"

"I will tell you," answered Red Richard, with a deep, oily chuckle. "I will show you straightly, my master, though you speak not civilly."

"Quick, then, catiff" cried O'Brasil, with impatient rage, "or, by the blessed Cathach, I'll find me a way to unloose your tongue!"

While the fiery Celt uttered these threatening words, Red Richard's tigerish orbs, glaring through the bars of his aventayle, were fixed on a low aperture in the cashel wall, that opened amid weeds and wild briars a few feet from where O'Brasil stood. This open-

ing was the entrance to a dark and narrow stone gallery, let into the thickness of the wall, one of which obscure passages ran around the ancient structure on either side and remain to this day, as a puzzle to the antiquary.

From this sinister doorway, as Red Richard looked, there emerged first one dark form, then another, and yet another, and stole up behind O'Brasil with noiseless tread. They were, all three, formidable looking figures, fiercely whiskered, clad in iron mail, and armed and accoutred to the teeth; their belts bristled with pistols and daggers, and each man grasped a steel-butted petronel in either hand.

"You ask me where is my master," said Red Richard, coolly, while his stealthy gaze followed the silent movements of the three armed figures, "my reply to that question is—Sir George Paulett is at home in Derry. You further wish to know my errand here. My answer thereto is—THIS !"

Red Richard's deep voice thundered out the last word, like a gun-clap; and as it left his lips, a heavy blow from the butt-end of a musketoon, dealt from behind by the foremost of the ambushed trio, descended full on O'Brasil's head, cleaving open his velvet barreadh, shearing away the pearl and eagle feather, and sending the young soldier reeling forward with a thousand irridescent sparks scintillating before his eyes.

The blow, terrible though it was, failed to prostrate the powerful and active youth; and, blinded and half-stunned as he was, with the blood spouting over his head, he made a desperate and gallant effort to recover himself and face his dastard foes. But a kick from Red Richard's heavy boot, and a shower of blows from musketoons and steel-butted petronels speedily beat him to the earth, and in a few minutes he lay bruised, bleeding, and insensible, and almost lifeless on the cashel floor, with his four ferocious assailants gathered about him, licking their lips like so many hungry wolves ravening for a banquet of blood.

"What are we to do with him?" demanded one of the three men—they were all soldiers of the garrison of Derry, most of whom were merely military bravos and bandits of the most savage and lawless type.

"Kill him," rejoined another, loosening a dagger in his belt, with a murderous gleam in his cruel eyes.

"Ay, cut his throat, to be sure," acceded the third, cheerfully—"spit him ! in the fiend's name, what else ?"

"Never say it again !" exclaimed he of the dagger, as he dropped his knee on O'Brasil's chest, and with a white glare in his merciless eyes, and fingers fairly itching with the lust of blood, he raised the gleaming blade on high and struck it down with all the force of his brawny arm.

But, before its deadly point could reach O'Brasil's breast, Red Richard struck the assassin's arm and dashed the blade aside, following up the onset by a kick that sent his savage confederate sprawling, head foremost, into a clump of bramble.

"Wait for orders, d——d dolt !" stormed the Red Esquire, fiercely. "By Beelzebub, yes ! if you would not be shot in your coffin to-night, in the high fort of Derry ! The governor himself will mete out his doom to this Irish churl. He is to dangle in hempen neckweeds from the city gate, and woe to the man who would baulk Paulett of his vengeance !"

"Hist !" exclaimed one of the men, "I hear the barking of a hound and the holla of a cow-herd !"

At that moment a black cow—a sleek, wild young beast, with her tail in the air—rushed through the open doorway of the old fort and began to course around its circular court, uttering short, deep bellows of rage or fear; while the hooves of the runaway creature were heard thundering by.

"In with you, villains !" cried Red Richard, pointing to the mouth of the stone gallery from which his accomplices had recently issued—"in with you and drag the prisoner along ! A murrain on that stupid brute, the herds will be here after her, and—— Quick, I say ! this deed must not be bruited abroad. So ! get out of sight—draw yourselves further back ! I would not have more murder on my hands than can be conveniently carried, withal."

As the Red Esquire delivered himself of this characteristic speech, two of his men seized O'Brasil, one dragging him by the shoulders, the other supporting his feet, and so conveyed him with some difficulty into the circular gallery, which was dark and narrow and gloomy as the grave, being only two feet in width by four in height.

The third individual of the party, the disappointed assassin, picked himself up out of the brambles, and sullenly followed his

comrades; while Red Richard Corbett, bringing up the rear, placed himself near the mouth of the passage to reconnoitre.

He had hardly so disposed himself when Gilla-na-bo and his dog burst into the cashel.

‘Dhoul an drimin dhuo!’ cried M’Teg, shaking his crooked ash-plant at the black cow, and bounding around the cashel like a red deer, “I’ll pay you for this, you thief! Out with her, Bran, good dog!—turn her, turn her! Dhamno ort, sir, what are you after there?”

This angry exclamation was caused by the peculiar movements of the dog, which for once, unheeding his master’s commands, stood snuffing and whining, with his muzzle to the earth, close to the cashel wall. M’Teg stopped suddenly, as his eye caught the white glow of the large pearl that had been shorn from O’Brasil’s barreadh. He stooped and picked it up with the eagle-feather to which it was attached. “Dhia!” he muttered, staring at them with wondering eyes, and noticing that both pearl and plume were stained with blood. Then, casting an alarmed glance around, he saw the crimson gouts on the moss-grown pavement, at which the hound was snuffing.

“By this blessed baccan!” exclaimed the cow-boy, apostrophising his stick, “there has been foul work here! It is an Irish feather,” he went on, glancing from the encrimsoned plume to the blood-stained earth—“ay, by St. Columb, the pearl and plume of an Irish duine vasal!—and, Bran, good dog, it’s as clear as St. Mura’s Well there has been murder done! Seek it out, old dog!” he added, patting the hound’s broad head, and pointing to the blood gouts on the pavement. “Seek it out, Bran! Who knows but we may track some villain home?”

The sagacious dog replied by a joyful bark; and, with his rough muzzle to the earth, ran straight along the sanguine trail to the mouth of the dark gallery in the cashel wall. Uttering a keen and prolonged howl, the animal rushed into the narrow aperture, and disappeared around the curve of the circular passage; while his master followed more warily, stooping his head to avoid striking it against the low, stone-flagged roof, and carrying his stout ash-plant well on guard.

A moment more, and the crack of a pistol-shot shook the confined space with its concussion; and with a wild yell of affright and

pain, the dog came tearing back along the narrow passage, nearly upsetting his master in his headlong flight.

M'Teg, too, retreated much faster than he had entered. The flash of the pistol in the dark gallery had shown him a glimpse of Red Richard's mail-clad figure crouched together under the low ledges of the roof of stone.

His first impulse was to fly for his life; his second to look to his dog, that lay rolling on the turf and howling piteously.

He ran to the wounded hound; "Bran, Bran, old dog, what have they done to you?" he cried. "Oh, vo! my gallant hound! an dhamno rogara dearga, have they killed you dead?"

As the youth uttered the last word he suddenly dropped his sorrowful face on his hound's shaggy and blood-dappled coat, and at that instant the balls of four petronels rang over his head.

With a startled yell, M'Teg sprang from the ground, bounding several feet into the air; and as he alighted again on terra firma he caught a momentary glimpse of four men standing before him in an irregular line, with smoking pistols in their hands.

Gilla hurled his ash-plant at the nearest figure with all the force of his sinewy arm, and then wheeled with his wildest cry. Even Bran was now quite forgotten.

He heard the clang of an iron casque and corslet as the man he had hit—no other than Red Richard himself—came down heavily on the moss-grown pavement, and understanding that his life depended on his speed, he made a wild dash for the cashel door. But one of his assailants had got there before him, and confronted him with a levelled pistol in each hand. Again the mountaineer turned like a flash. But the remaining two were now directly in his path; they rushed upon him, one with a drawn sword, the other with fresh pistols cocked—rushed upon him with shouts of brutal laughter! Gilla doubled once more, like a hunted hare, and as he did so, the fearful swish of the keen sword-blade as it cut the empty air, and the crack of two pistol shots warned him that by the lightning quickness of his movements he had again eluded death—eluded it by a single hairs-breadth!

Gilla set his teeth and tightened his muscles, and dashed straight forward, with a reckless and fierce despair, straight on the muzzle of the levelled petronel. At that instant, as if to consummate his

doom, the black cow which all that time never ceased to course around the cashel, came galloping right across the pathway of the hunted youth. It was only a momentary obstruction; but poor M'Teg could not turn aside to avoid it; death and destruction were behind and before him, on the right hand and on the left. The moment of fate had arrived.

Two pistol shots rang out sharply in quick succession, and in the same instant Gilla-na-bo rose into the air with a short, shrill cry—rose into the air like a rocket, clearing both the mad beast and the pistolier at a single, soaring spring. Simultaneously with the leap and the pistol shots the black cow rolled over on the moss-grown pavement with two brass bullets in her carcase.

A moment more—hardly a breathing space—and with another long, wild yell, Gilla-na-bo vaulted clear over the cashel wall—clear over it, with flying leap—over with a leonine spring that left the heavy bravos of Derry dumbfounded with amazement, and—away!

By the time the soldiers had scrambled across the cashel court and out through the narrow doorway, Gilla could be seen far off through the twilight shadows, holding his course down the mountain side, leaping from bank to brae like a wild deer, and running along the level bottoms at a speed that even a horseman, in that rugged and broken ground, would have failed to overtake. His dog, too, whose hide had been merely furrowed by the ball from Red Richard's petronel, was bounding along by his side.

Gilla was already beyond the range of pistol-shot or musquetoon, and the idea of pursuit was useless. His flight was not destined, however, to be wholly uninterrupted.

Chapter 7.

GREY GRANU'S CAVE—TIDINGS OF ILL.

On dashed M'Teg down the undulating mountain slopes, unconsciously pursuing the same path which Shiel O'Brasil had climbed before with such a light heart and step. As he ran, the rocky knoll on which Grey Granu had stood when she accosted O'Brasil in such startling language lay directly in his path. From the upper side it presented an elevation of only a few feet, but a deep ravine choked with hazel bushes ran along the lower.

M'Teg was ignorant of the conformation of the ground, and he had no thought of going out of his way for such a trifling obstruction. Coming forward at full speed, he cleared the hillock at a flying leap, but landed, head foremost, in the ravine at the other side with a shock that stunned him. When the cowboy recovered his senses he found himself lying in semi-darkness, with the strange figure of the Grey Woman bending over him, while she bathed his brow and hands with some liquid contained in a rude, earthen urn, the like of which he had never seen before.

"Dhoul dim !" muttered M'Teg, in a terrified undertone, as he raised himself on his elbow, and gazed around him.

"Peace, fool !" interrupted Grey Granu, in stern and commanding tones. "Where is the young duine vasal, and what has befallen him ?"

"Whom do you mean?" faltered Gilla, turning a cowering glance on the Grey Woman.

"The noble youth who went up the mountain at the hour of sunset. You saw him? This is his pearl and feather."

As Grey Granu spoke she held out O'Brasil's plume, all crushed and blood-stained, on her shrivelled palm.

"Blessed day! Where did you get that?" gasped the cowboy, in increasing trepidation.

"In your hand, blockhead, or knave, for I know not which to call you. Where is its gallant owner, Captain Shiel O'Brasil? Speak, and speak quickly, bouchal-bo!"

"Did you say Shiel O'Brasil?—eh, Captain Shiel?" cried M'Teg, in much consternation.

"The same. Where is he?"

"As God heats me," answered the cowboy, "I saw him not—where he is I do not know! I found that bauble in a pool of blood on the old cashel floor; but I knew not that I had it still in my hand, or that I had carried it here with me.

"Wherefore were you flying? Were you pursued?"

Then, in a few rapid and excited sentences, the youth related his adventure in the dun of Aileach, with all that he had done and seen and heard therein.

"They have murdered him, then!" exclaimed the Grey Woman, in mournful and piercing tones. "Alas! brave youth, I read thy destiny."

And drawing up her tall form with an assumption of easy, yet lofty dignity, that altered marvellously her whole appearance, and formed a striking contrast with her coarse attire and wretched surroundings, she passed O'Brasil's pearl and feather to Gilla-na-bo with one hand, and with the other pointed to the dark opening at one end of the cave.

"Take this, and away," she said, in commanding tones—"away to O'Doherty at Buncrana Castle, and tell him his captain of horse has been murdered by the marauders of Derry."

The woman turned when she had so spoken, and passing through the narrow aperture at the opposite end of the chamber, disappeared from sight.

Gilla moved quickly towards the other dark portal indicated by

Grey Granu. He looked around. The Grey Woman had disappeared within her cave—sunk into the earth, perhaps, for aught he knew, for neither she nor her eerie lurking-place was visible to his eyes. Daylight had long faded; the myriad stars were out with their twinkling lamps in the wide fields of heaven; and a thin, crescent moon hung like a silver sickle above the deep-flowing Swilly. Gilla-na-bo filled his lungs once or twice with a deep draught of the free air of heaven; then his reeling brain grew steady; his courage and strength returned.

The light-footed messenger performed his journey in a marvelously short space of time; and when he arrived in the castle courtyard, he found there a few of O'Doherty's last remaining guests in all the bustle of instant departure. A huge, old, lumbering chariot, looking as large as a house on wheels, covered with painting and gilding, and having its panels adorned with allegorical figures, was drawn up close to the castle door. Half a dozen grim MacLoughlins, mounted on rough roadsters, were marshalled behind and before the coach. Every man had a skene-fada in his girdle and a two-edged axe in his right hand; and wore over his full-pleated, saffron shirt a jack of thrum, a coarse woollen fabric, interwoven with scales of steel. They had on their heads iron basinetts, whose dents and furrows showed the unmistakable tokens of many a hard-fought fray.

Just within the castle door stood Sir Cahir and Lady O'Doherty, the old chieftain of Carn gall, and his two fair girls. Gilla-na-bo, full of the importance of his errand, pressed forward to the castle door, and made a low obeisance to the chief, but the chief did not notice him. He moved a little nearer; but though he stood directly before the departing guests, no one seemed to see him. Fearing to intrude farther, M'Teg stood still where he was, and waited to catch the chieftain's eye.

In the centre of the group within the door stood Irene Magennis, leaning heavily on Una's arm. She was wrapped in a long mantle of crimson velvet, and a white veil was folded around her head, and pinned on one side by a silver bodkin.

Her face was white as the veil that enwreathed her head, its marble pallor throwing into startling and strong relief the jetty blackness of her straight, delicate brows, and long, shadowing eyelashes. Her small hands were tightly clasped around Una's

arm, yet the fingers fluttered like leaves. Her colourless lips, from which her breath came in short, intermittent gasps, quivered convulsively; and out from the dead-white face, Irene's great, dusk, luminous eyes burned with a wildly-bright and starry lustre that was beautiful and terrifying.

"My dear, you are not fit to travel," said Lady O'Doherty, in her calm, gentle tones, "I feel that I should not permit you to go out from our house to-night."

"Take me home!" said Irene, in a low, quick tone, while her great dark eyes rested full on the face of her foster-father, with their wide, burning gaze,

"Do stay, my child," pleaded the old chief, in a deeply-distressed voice, "you are not well enough to risk such a journey."

"Take me home!" reiterated Irene, with the same unchanging look and tone—"take me home."

"Will you not plead with her, Una?" said Sir Cahir, in low, troubled tones.

"I have already done so," returned the fair girl, "and to all that I could advance, her answer was still the same. Since morning, when I found her in that deadly swoon on the chamber floor, I have been endcavouring to persuade her to go to bed—to consent to accept the kindly hospitality of Lady O'Doherty and yourself, until she should be well enough to travel with safety. I do not think the dear girl understood or heard what I was saying. She only clung to me as she is doing now, and cried out, ever and always—'take me home! take me home!' I would now add my voice to hers, and say, let us take her home, since it is so much her wish."

"Be it so, then, in God's name!" assented the MacLaughlin, with a sigh. "Farewell, my friends all—farewell kindly."

With their arms about her trembling form the old chieftain and his fair daughter conveyed Irene to the chariot; and she was soon placed in a seat prepared for her in its roomy and cavernous interior. Una lingered for a moment at the chariot door, gazing around her with wistful eyes. There was one absent amongst those who bade her farewell at the castle door—one for whose neglect she could not account, for whose parting word she waited and watched in vain.

Where was Shiel O'Brasil?

With a sigh, she entered the vehicle and seated herself by Irene's side, yet near the door; while her father gave some final directions to his mounted escort.

Meanwhile, Gilla-na-bo stepped up to O'Doherty, and pulling his flaxen forelock with one hand, held out O'Brasil's pearl and feather with the other.

"What is this, my good fellow?" inquired the chief, taking the articles in his hand, and glancing from them to the wild, young figure of the cowboy, all torn and dishevelled and soiled with sweat and blood and dirt.

"I found them in the dun of Aileach," returned M'Teg, promptly, "a calliagh told me they belonged to the young duine vasal, Captain Shiel O'Brasil, and she sent me here with them, hot foot."

"Good God! it is O'Brasil's plume!" exclaimed O'Doherty, looking more closely at the jewel, with its crumpled feather—"and stained with blood, too! In heaven's name, boy, where is he? What has happend my gallant captain?"

"That I know not, noble chief," answered Gilla, "but the devil and the Derriers were up yonder in the fort of Aileach—oh, there was wild work yonder! My light heels took me well out of it, but Bran, poor dog! got his skin ploughed up by the ball of a horse-pistol, and the drimin dhuv is lying in the cashel with two brass bullets in her.

"Pray hold your tidings of dogs and cattle," interrupted the chief, impatiently, "What of Captain O'Brasil?—Did you see him? Is he hurt—slain—and, if so, by whom? Speak at once, and speak quickly!"

By this time everyone in the Castle courtyard had gathered eagerly about the cowboy, with the exception only of Irene and Una. The former was past comprehending the events that were transpiring around her. The latter, bending forward, with outstretched hands clasped before her; with rigid lips, widely parted, and eyes wild and dark with agony, sat mute and motionless in her dim corner of the old cavernous coach, listening to every word with a cold horrible fear and terror clutching her heart with icy fingers, and freezing the life-pulse in her veins. She could not speak; she could not cry out, she could only listen—listen, with her stricken heart dying within her—listen as if every faculty were merged in that one sense of hearing, while Gilla-na-bo related, with

many a quaint phrase and graphic gesture, all that he had to tell of his adventure in the dun of Aileach, added to his rencontre with Grey Granu, and the knowledge gained from the strange tenant of the cave that O'Brasil had gone up to the fort at sunset, that the soldiers of Derry had been there before him, and that he had not returned. Moreover, that the weird woman had foreseen his death, and it could not be doubted that he was slain.

"Slain !" Una MacLaughlin tried to repeat that one dreadful word, but the breath of life seemed frozen on her lips. Her outstretched hands dropped slowly into her lap, her fair fingers unclasping as they fell. Her form swayed backward until it settled into the corner of the coach. She had found temporary relief in insensibility.

No one noticed her. The wild excitement of the moment had caught every heart, and strong murmurs of grief and vengeance arose on every side. Sir Cahir O'Doherty glanced around him with flashing eyes and quivering nostrils.

"What think you of this, my friends ?" he cried. "Another foul outrage has been committed at our doors by this bloody brood of Derry !"

"I fear so," returned old Bryan MacLaughlin, in sad and gloomy tones. "Fareer ! the free hills of our own stormy North are no longer what they used to be !"

"They shall be free, by heaven !" cried the young chieftain, with a passionate vehemence, "while there lives an O'Doherty to guard his own !"

Then, raising a silver trumpet to his lips, he blew a long resounding blast, whose notes, shrill and wild, awoke many an answering echo on sea and shore, and made the grey old border fortress ring from cope to groundstone.

In a very few moments all the vassals and retainers of O'Doherty within sound of trumpet-call were assembled about their young chieftain in the castle courtyard, waiting silently and expectantly for his commands.

The few gentlemen who still remained at the castle also crowded around, eager to learn the cause of the sudden tumult.

O'Hanlon instinctively tightened his sword-belt and cocked his eagle feather.

"What is it, O'Doherty ?" he cried blithely.

"Shiel O'Brasil, my gallant captain of horse," replied O'Doherty, mastering his passion by a powerful effort, and managing to speak with some degree of calmness, "has been waylaid—murdered, it would appear—in the dun of Aileach by the Saxon bandits of Derry City. I know not yet precisely how the matter stands, but I swear by the blessed Cathach of Columbkille I in that he has suffered they, too, shall suffer; and if he is slain, his murderers shall pay his eric in their heart's best blood!"

"Farrah!" cried O'Hanlon, waving his spanish blade, "I pledge you the sword of Orior to aid in collecting the tribute."

O'Doherty stretched out his hand to his impetuous kinsman, "I will not bear it!" he exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with passion: "I have given my allegiance to the Reagh Sassnach, but I bargained not, by heaven, for deeds like this!"

"My father is pledged to old Shemus Stuart, but never my father's son," cried O'Hanlon, lightly. "The English king has many lieges, our poor, old country has now but few."

"Have a care of what you do, gentlemen," said the warning voice of the old chieftain of Carn gall, "young blood is sometimes over hasty. In this matter I would counsel prudence."

"In this matter I shall demand satisfaction," returned O'Doherty, sternly. "If my gallant captain has been done to death, I say, let his murderers beware, for the walls of Derry shall be too thin to shield them."

"Cahir, my lord and love, take care! take care!" cried Lady C'Doherty, advancing to his side and clinging to his arm, "this looks like sheer rebellion!"

"Rebellion!" repeated O'Doherty, with a curl of his proud lip—"rebellion against murder and outrage—be it so!"

"But love, for my sake, you will be prudent," pleaded the gentle bride, "you know in these sad days a word, a look, a breath of suspicion even, means death and attainder to an Irish noble."

"For your sake, Mary, I will do and suffer all that a man and a chieftain may—with honour! Sweet wife, let that content you. You yourself would ask no more of me."

Meanwhile, preparations for the coming expedition went on apace. "Ho, there! Cawbar O'Doherty!" cried Sir Cahir, raising his clear voice. The henchman strode forward from the crowd and doffed his barreadh, with a deep obeisance.

"Pick me out ten stout gallow-glasses of the guard," commanded the chief, "let them be fully armed and accoutred with iron jack and head-piece, skene-fada, axe, and petronel. Mount and parade them at the castle gate with all possible speed, and do you hold yourself ready to attend me."

Again the henchman bowed with silent reverence; and soon his deep, bass voice was heard in the courtyard, selecting and marshalling his little band.

While Cawbar O'Doherty was selecting his men the old chieftain of Carn gall stepped forward, and in anxious tones begged leave to accompany his youthful chief, provided some suitable person could be found to escort his daughters to their home.

"If my services be acceptable in that capacity, I beg you to consider them at your command," said a grave, musical voice in reply.

As the words were spoken there was a hurried shuffling of feet and lifting of barreadhs, accompanied by cries of "Father O'Mull-arkiel!" "The heavens be about him, it's our own soggarth a stoir!" "Make way for Father Edmund!" "Room for the soldier-priest!"

Amid a perfect fusilade of such joyous cries, a tall man in the brown habit of a Franciscan friar made his way through the crowd.

The friar was a young man of commanding presence, with a full, dark-grey eye and a remarkably handsome face—a face expressing benignity, zeal, and determination. There were also lines of humour about the well-formed mouth, and a suspicion of more than priestly fire in the clear, gray orbs beneath the straight, dark brows.

MacLaughlin stepped forward and warmly grasped the friar's hand.

"A thousand thanks for your kind and most timeous offer," said the old chieftain, with much emotion. "I fear my poor girls have great need of your consolations."

"Mille failthe, Father Edmond," cried Sir Cahir, taking the disengaged hand of the Franciscan in both his own, "you have been invisible for the last three months; where have you been?"

"In prison," answered the friar, promptly.

"In prison!" echoed O'Doherty and all the others in a breath—

"In prison—where?" added Sir Cahir, knitting his brow.

"In the house of the Bishop of Derry," returned the Franciscan with a smile, "studying for my spiritual good the Protestant

Book of Common Prayer, printed in the Latin tongue."

"Gadso !" cried O'Hanlon, with a laugh, "was the Bishop trying to convert you ?"

"Even so," replied the Franciscan, still smiling, "his lordship thinks the devil in Latin should go down better with a monk than the devil in English; so he has got a thousand volumes translated, and ready for circulation amongst the Irish priests."

A burst of hearty laughter, in which the friar quietly joined, greeted the announcement.

"But I did not stay to finish my studies," resumed he, "I took a summary leave of my teacher and jailer to-night, and—here I am !"

"I met a weird woman on Grianan Hill who told me of O'Brasil's murder. Go, in God's name, and see justice done !"

"Then take my children home at once, I beseech you," said the old chieftain of Carn gall, in a low tone to the friar. "God shield us ! sore trouble hath befallen both. Yet out of evil good may come—this murdered youth stood in the way of my Una's welfare—though, heaven knows, I never wished him hurt ! He was a brave boy as ever stood in shoe-leather, but he had no pedigree !"

"If he is dead he has found one," said the friar, shortly—"in the dust from which all are sprung, and to which all return.

With these words he turned to MacLaughlin's cavalcade, and in his prompt and decisive way ordered them to proceed. Then, as the huge old chariot began to move, creaking, swaying, jolting, and squeaking, as if every gilded panel, pictured saint, escutcheon, text, and scroll, which covered over all its vast exterior, were emitting its own peculiar note to swell the general chorus, Father Edmond entered the vehicle within which Una sat, partially recovered from her swoon, but stunned and stupefied with excess of horror and misery; and within which, on a pile of cushions, poor Irene Magennis lay, with her wide and death-white face, still muttering, with quick and fevered lips, that appeal to "Take me home ! take me home !" which had ceased to bear any meaning to her own clouded mind.

In another minute the courtyard was almost empty; Father Edmond and his charges going northwards towards Carn gall, and O'Doherty taking the road to Derry with his little guard of gallow-glasses, accompanied by Phelim Reagh, the young Tanist of Orior,

and the venerable chieftain of Carn gall.

O'Doherty was mounted on a splendid black steed; O'Hanlon on a gallant grey; the others had all trusty roadsters, and they spurred hard. As they swept along their horses' iron-shod hoofs rang out like thunder on the hard and hilly road. The silvery, moonlit swells and the deep hollows of pearl-white mist passed beneath them and away like the swift visions of a dream. They galloped hard; for grief and rage and impatient vengeance were in the hearts of all.

Yet they would have galloped harder could they have looked over the woods and glens, the bogs and hills, the white mists and grey rivers that lay between them and Derry City, and caught sight of the ghastly tragedy that even then was being enacted there !

Chapter 8.

O'BRASIL'S RIDE TO DERRY—PAULETT'S VENGEANCE.

When Shiel O'Brasil returned to consciousness it was but to the consciousness of almost intolerable pain.

He found himself bound on the back of a horse which was going at full speed, the reins held by a trooper who rode beside him. Two others galloped in front, and one brought up the rere.

They were, of course, Red Richard Corbett and his three horsemen from the garrison of Derry, and thither they were now returning as fast as hoof and spur could speed them.

O'Brasil's wounded head pained him intensely. His limbs, all bruised by blows, were tied with such cruel tightness that the cords cut into the flesh, causing a throe of cruellest agony to shoot through his frame at every spring of the horse on the rugged road. He made an effort to alter his position, but he could no more move hand or foot than could have Mazeppa on his wild desert steed. The attempt only resulted in an increase of suffering, and a deep, irrepressible groan burst from his pale and bloody lips.

"Odds-daggers ! hast found thy senses ?—Does the jer-falcon begin to feel his jesses ?" cried the mocking voice of Red Richard, around whose left wrist were wound the reins of O'Brasil's horse. "Gadzooks ! you ride gallantly," proceeded he, "face downward, as befits your country."

"Villain, you shall pay dearly for this lawless brutality !" panted O'Brasil, clenching his strong white teeth to prevent another groan

escaping him—"You and your ruffian-master shall rue this dastardly and outrageous deed!"

"Pity you shall not live to see our repentance," retorted Corbett, "for, in truth, it must be something of a spectacle! When Sir George Paulett shall be master of Innishowen, and I constable of Derry, as my Lord Deputy hath duly promised; when the fair Una MacLoughlin is making sweet cakes and hippocrass for Sir George, in Buncrana, and the dark-eyed Irene tying true-love knots for my Lord Deputy in Dundalk, I wot it will be time enough then for the rueing to begin."

"Silence, foul-mouthed wretch!" cried O'Brasil, choking with wild rage that made him forget his pain, "dare not to take these ladies names on lips like yours!"

"I may take one of them in my arms some day, which shall be more to the purpose," answered the Red Esquire with an insulting laugh; "if Paulett bungles his wooing, as, 'fore Beelzebub, 'tis like he will, yon milk-white doe will then be my lawful game. As for the little dark devil, whom Chichester fancies, I say, let my Lord Deputy have her, and welcome."

O'Brasil remained silent; but his frame quivered with excess of wrath until great blood gouts dropped from his wrists and ankles, where the tight cords had cut into his flesh.

"I tell you these things to comfort you," resumed Red Richard, with a fiendish grin.

"Villain!" breathed O'Brasil, in a low, tense tone; "if these things reach O'Doherty's ears he will have your head struck off.

"You would tell him, doubtless," sneered Corbett, "and set your Irish wolf-dog on my track? But—dead men tell no tales!"

"You mean that you will murder me?"

"I mean that you have not long to live."

"You will not dare," said O'Brasil, "my chieftain would avenge me."

"Dare!" echoed the other with a fierce laugh, "not dare to to hang an Irish churl?—a follower of the Pope and Antichrist, a child of perdition, as the Bishop would say; a harbourer of proscribed priests and Jesuits, a concocter of rebellion, an agent of Spain? We have but to fling any or all of these charges, and be sure the mud will stick. Dare! why, last month we flayed an old

monk alive because he obstinately refused to discover where the plate and altar-vessels of his monastery were hidden. Then we tied his red carcase in a sack and flung it into the Foyle at ebb tide, to float out to the Atlantic or the devil!

"Dare, did you say? What became of Morion Burke and his daughter Erna, who were taken up by our fellows as Spanish emissaries, and lodged in the guardroom of the high fort in Derry?—eh, what became of them?"

"'Twas a false charge, and they escaped—at least, so 'twas said," returned O'Brasil, with an involuntary shiver.

"They escaped," rejoined Red Richard, with a fiendish chuckle—"to another world! The wench was pretty, and some of the lads had the good taste to see it. The father interfered. We hewed off his head, in a twinkling, and flung him into the ditch beyond the ramparts. The daughter, a bonnie, little gold-haired mite, she lived a week for our pleasure, and then died for her own,—she blew out her brains with the first musketoon she got her pretty hands on. Mahound! it saved us the trouble of execution, and we shovelled her into the ditch, with the old rebelly pater—dare! ha! ha!"

The young soldier had no desire to exchange further words with his villainous captor; and for the rest of the journey he remained silent, clenching his teeth hard to prevent any expression of pain escaping him. Soon the broad and stately Foyle spread out its waters before them, heaving and rippling in the silvery moonlight; and beyond, rose gently swelling from the water's edge, the green and ancient hill of "the Derrie," crowned by the roofs and ramparts, the gates and bastions, and the two grim forts of the new English city.

This new city of Derry—for at that time it was but seven years old—stood on the site where a cluster of venerable religious foundations had, for centuries long, through storm and shine, through peace and war, disseminated the gentle blessings of learning and piety over the Northern land. The new city was the first foothold of English domination in the North. Founded by an English general with the aid of a powerful fleet and army; inhabited by an imported colony of Scotch and English settlers, it formed the base of operations in the succeeding wars, from which to harass and terrorise those warlike clans that, fierce and free as the eagles

of their own mist-clad hills, had so long defied the armed power of England.

Now, however, the long struggle was over, the long battle lost.

Now there was peace in Ireland—such peace as subsists between the victorious highwayman and his conquered victim.

As this thought crossed the prisoner's mind he arrived with his guards at the gate of the high fort of Derry. The portal was open, and a musketeer on sentry paced to and fro before it. The sentinel came smartly to his front, and presented arms as the Red Esquire rode up.

"The Governor is waiting for you, sir," he said. "You will find him in the inner room in the fort."

Then, without giving the parole or being asked for it, Red Richard passed with his prisoner through the embattled arch, and dismounting, threw his reins to an orderly.

"Unbind the prisoner and bring him before the Governor," commanded he, and the order was instantly obeyed.

The cords were cut that secured O'Brasil's limbs; but so benumbed and stiff were they, that when he was lifted from his horse he was quite unable to stand, and, despite his efforts, sank helplessly to the ground.

Two of the troopers seized his shoulders and dragged him through a low-arched passage into the fort. They passed through an outer apartment, in which another sentinel stood on guard, entered an inner chamber, and dragging him into the middle of the floor, dropped him, like a log, on the stone pavement, and at a sign from Red Richard withdrew to the outer room.

Sir George Paulett, who for the last three hours had been pacing to and fro, like a caged panther, the length of the narrow chamber within the fort, sprang forward eagerly to meet his subordinate. There was a few minutes' whispered conversation between the pair; two or three ejaculations of satisfaction from Paulett, and then the Red Esquire also retired.

O'Brasil was alone with his arch-enemy. The young man strove to raise his stiffened neck and gaze around; but the effort was vain. He lay as if chained to the floor in intolerable torture, while the blood began to creep through his benumbed veins with a thousand shooting pains like red-hot needles. His quivering eyelids closed, and not all his pride and all his fortitude could

check the moan of intense agony that issued from his lips.

An exultant laugh from Paulett was the instant response; and O'Brasil's dark eyes unclosed with a flash of defiant scorn.

The Knight of Derry stood over him, his face aglow with fiendish hate and triumph, his red eyes gloating, snapping like a wolf's.

"Soho ! my bold chanticleer ! my cock-o'-game !" he cried, "thy crow is cowed, thy spurs cropped already ? How has it come so low with thee of a sudden ?"

For some minutes pain and weakness prevented O'Brasil from replying to this taunting speech. But by degrees his blood began to course more freely through his veins; he struggled to his feet and, supporting himself by grasping the back of a chair, confronted his triumphant foe.

"Thou art a pretty man !" sneered Paulett, as he ran his sinister eye over the soiled and dishevelled person, the pale, bloodstained face, and blood-clotted hair of his youthful rival. O'Brasil gazed at his triumphant enemy for a few seconds with an eye that returned scorn for scorn.

"Coward !" he said then, in a voice thrilling with passion, "pitiful and paltry coward ! you are now safe to taunt the man whom your bandit crew have disarmed and wounded—him you dared not meet in honourable combat—him who has beaten you in field and bower, in love and war !"

This last luckless boast, wrung from the angry youth by the taunts of his brutal enemy, was the final drop wanting to fill up the measure of Paulett's hate and vengeance.

"Sayest thou so, misproud braggart," he exclaimed, shaking his fist in the face of the helpless prisoner, while his scowling countenance grew livid with jealous fury. "Then, by all the fiends ! never more in field or bower, in love or war, will you cross the path of my purpose after this living hour ! Guards, guards, Corbett !" he added, raising his voice to a shriek, "bring hither the true-love-knot for this amorous swain. Let it be long and strong and of enduring constancy—quick ! quick, by heaven, I would not be delayed !"

Almost as the Governor spoke, Red Richard, who had evidently anticipated the order, entered the apartment with a coil of rope in his huge, hairy hand, and followed by three fierce-looking halberdiers, whose whiskered faces were flushed, as was his own, by

recent draughts of new and fiery usquebaugh.

"The loop!" said Paulett, with a ferocious gesture.

Obediently, and with fearful expertness, the Red Esquire proceeded to throw a running noose on the end of the rope he held.

"What mean you?" cried O'Brasil in startled tones, as he noted these ominous proceedings.

Now the dark words of Paulett and the dreadful preparations of his ferocious lieutenant awoke him rudely to the horrible reality.

"What would you do?" he demanded, in a voice sharp with sudden alarm.

"Hang you!" answered Paulett, savagely.

"What!" cried O'Brasil, raising his voice and speaking in stern and warning tones. "Will you the responsible Governor of this city, dare to commit open murder? Remember, my chieftain is a king's officer, and I, like yourself, am a subject of King James, and protected by his laws."

"I'm going to hang you!" returned Paulett, with ferocious emphasis, "and when you are dead, when the seagulls of Lough Foyle have picked you bare, and when the dogs are riscing your bones in the ditch of Derry, Una MacLaughlin shall be mine—my wife—slave—servant—what I will—mine as helplessly as you are now! Away with him!" commanded Paulett. "Swing the dog-Irishman from the parapet of the city gate. Away, away, I say! Hoist him over!"

"You cannot mean this!" cried O'Brasil, springing back as Red Richard advanced upon him. "You will never dare to perpetrate this cruel and cold-blooded and savage murder! Back, catiff! I will not submit. Help! murder! help! Paulett, the day will —Mercy, God!"

This last despairing invocation was gasped forth by the struggling and strangling youth, as Red Richard, by the help of his halberdiers, having speedily mastered such feeble resistance as their victim, unarmed, wounded, and weak from loss of blood, was able to offer, deftly drew the noose around O'Brasil's neck, and jerked him violently to the floor.

In a moment his arms and limbs were securely pinioned. He was seized on all sides by the rude grasp of the murderers, and dragged away to the place of doom, Red Richard still holding the rope, and Paulett following, with exultant stride.

They passed through the outer apartment of the fort, on through the narrow passage leading to the gate, dragging along their bound and helpless victim, with the noose tightened to strangulation about his throat.

They speedily reached the platform above the gate, and Red Richard, with cool and terrible celerity, proceeded to knot the fatal cord around one of the stone merlins above the embattled archway.

"God," said O'Brasil, solemnly, as he raised his dark eyes heavenward for their last look on this side of eternity—"God will"——

The sentence was cut short by a sudden, savage jerk of the ignominious rope, and as Paulett drew it tight, at a sign to his myrmidons, poor Shiel O'Brasil was lifted from the platform and hurled over the battlements.

A moment more and his body hung in the soft, moonlight air, before the grim gateway of the high fort, in all the agonies of strangulation. Round swung the horrid cord; it swayed to and fro; it shook with the tremors of the young soldier's convulsed limbs; while Paulett, bending over the battlement, gazed at his suspended victim with red, gloating eyes, and a face full of fiendish and ferocious joy.

"This," he cried—"This is vengeance!"

Even as the words passed his lips, the sound of horses' hoofs came through the clear, still air—the dull, thunderous thud! thud! of hard-galloping hoof-strokes on the turf of the unpaved bog-road leading to the city. Nearer came the sound. Thew were riding, these horsemen, at a speed that devoured distance!

In a moment two cavaliers swept round a curve of the brown bog-road, and came dashing on towards the city gate. They were Sir Cahir O'Doherty and O'Hanlon of Orior, now far in advance of their little cavalcade, and urging their splendid steeds to their utmost speed. At the first glance Paulett recognised the foremost rider. The stately form and fair, flowing hair of the young chieftain of Innishowen and the proud, black steed that carried him were not to be mistaken.

The Governor glanced down hurriedly at the suspended body of Shiel O'Brasil, and a gleam of demoniac satisfaction lightened in his eyes. "It is over!" he ejaculated, grimly; then to Red Richard:

"Cut him down! Quick! Haul the dead carcase into the prison vaults under my house. Ha! ha! the Buck of Buncrana arrives too late!"

Even as Paulett spoke, the Red Esquire, prompt to obey, called to some soldiers who had congregated below to take hold of "the felon's body" as it fell. At the same instant, with a quick slash of his sword, the rope was severed, and the distorted form of poor O'Brasil fell in a heap into the soldiers' outstretched arms.

"In with it," commanded Paulett. "Shut the gate, guards, and do not admit these malaperts without my orders!"

The limp form of O'Brasil, his handsome face all black and contorted, his lips swollen, his eyes and tongue protruding fearfully, was dragged through the archway and away to the prison vaults. The Governor retired within the fort, and the city gate was shut.

When O'Doherty and his youthful kinsman galloped up a moment later, and drew rein before the closed portal, the sentinel on the battlements looked down with his most stolid air, and challenged, "Who goes there?"

"The O'Doherty!" answered Sir Cahir, curtly and haughtily. "Open the gate!"

"The password?" demanded the sentinel.

"I know nothing of your passwords, sirrah. I desire to see the Governor—at once."

After considerable delay the sergeant of the guard appeared behind the battlements, and informed O'Doherty that the Governor had retired for the night. It was too late for him to receive visitors.

"Sir George Paulett's retirement was marvellously sudden," said Sir Cahir, angrily. "I saw him over the gate with his esquire as I rode up. The gate was then open—why was it shut in our faces? Open the gate," he commanded, again addressing the sentinel. "I am the high sheriff of the county. I have business with the Governor that will brook no delay; if I am refused an entrance, I shall force it, and that full soon."

"Guard!" called the sentinel, "tell the Governor these Irish rufflers be bound to get over the wall an' they doant make through the gate!"

The footsteps of the soldier were heard ringing on the pavement as he departed on his mission; and immediately afterwards Paulett

appeared on the platform above the gate, wearing a close casque, and complete suit of mail.

"What is your errand here?" demanded he, insolently. "What make ye at my city gate, raising a tumult at this untimely hour, when the portals are shut and all good subjects abed and asleep?"

"Give me entrance," said O'Doherty, in an incensed tone, "Do you suppose I will parley with you, like a footpad, through a barred gate?"

"An' if I refuse to open it to you and your unruly rabblement, unless I open it to take you and them prisoner?" retorted Paulett.

"I beseech you, Sir George," said MacLaughlin, stepping forward and speaking in mild and dignified tones, "open the gate and admit my friend, Sir Cahir. This want of courtesy to one who had been lately your host can tend little to the peace and goodwill that should exist between near neighbours and liege subjects. Besides, our business is most important and demands your immediate attention."

"I crave pardon, noble sir," returned Paulett, in most deferential tones, "had I known that you were of Sir Cahir's company, you had not been kept a moment waiting. I could ill refuse to unbar my city gate for one to whom my heart has long been open."

Surprised and flattered by this fair, false speech, the poor old chief bowed low, and thanked the Governor with gentle urbanity.

"Villain and hypocrite!" muttered O'Doherty, in his young kinsman's ear, "what means this sudden bending to MacLaughlin?"

"Una!" whispered O'Hanlon, in reply; "the wind blows south, and love is in the gale."

"Handle your axes, men," said M'Devitt, in a low, fierce whisper; "I never distrust the devil so much as when he speaks fair. Stirrup to stirrup—close up behind the chief—three abreast as we pass the gate!"

As M'Devitt spoke, the portal was opened wide, and Sir Cahir and his friends passed through, the gallowglasses following in close array.

"This way, gentlemen," said Paulett, now the very pink of politeness, as he led the way to his own house, up the steep, dark, unpaved street of the new fortress city.

Paulett raised a silver whistle to his lips and blew a note which was instantly responded to by the unclosing of the heavy oaken

door; and the Governor ushered his visitors into a large, square hall, flagged with marble slabs, and raftered and wainscotted with black oak from the same Abbey church that had supplied the gates.

O'Doherty then briefly and clearly explained the nature of his errand, concluding with these words:

"I am here to ask you, Sir George Paulett, to have this matter investigated, to have the body of my friend, alive or dead, and justice meted out to the malefactors."

"It appears to me, Sir Cahir, that your tale is somewhat flimsy," answered Paulett, haughtily, "the ravings of a mad witch, and the cock-and-bull stories of a rude Irish yokel are scarce material for serious consideration by responsible officers of the King. I decline to take any steps on such baseless and wild assertions."

"Let me beg of you, Sir George Paulett," said MacLaughlin, again interposing in the interests of peace, "to give the matter your serious consideration. In corroboration of Sir Cahir's words, he has shown you O'Brasil's blood-stained plume. There is no doubt that a deed of violence has been committed. Alas! there is no doubt that the poor youth has been waylaid and slain by four of your soldiers from the garrison of Derry."

"If such is your belief, I no longer demur," said Paulett, deferring to MacLaughlin once more, with flattering readiness, "I will be guided solely by the wisdom which I know you to possess."

MacLaughlin thanked him with much feeling, and Sir Cahir also was fain to express himself satisfied.

"Is it your pleasure to stay and assist me with my investigations, or shall I send you notice when they have been completed?" enquired Paulett, with, for him, marvellous courtesy, yet with a covert sneer in his manner that jarred on the quick sensibilities of O'Doherty and O'Hanlon.

But MacLaughlin hastened to say:—"I am sure we may safely entrust the whole matter to Sir George; he has means of arriving at the truth with regard to the doings of his men that are not shared by us, while outside we may prosecute our inquiries with more success."

Sir Cahir and his friends coincided in this opinion, and all the more readily that they knew investigation by him, within the stronghold of Derry, on matters pertaining to the misdemeanours of its garrison would prove worse than fruitless.

After receiving another solemn assurance from Paulett that the matter would be enquired into without delay, O'Doherty and his friends turned to depart.

The next minute the little band was riding down the steep, narrow, and crooked streets—streets so irregular as hardly to deserve the name—and every gentleman, with the exception of MacLaughlin of Carn gall, kept one hand on his sword-hilt beneath his cloak, or grasped his girdle-pistol; while the gallow-glasses, clutching their two-edged tuaths, at a whispered command from Phelim Reagh, rode in open order, half expecting a fusilade from behind some of the loopholed bawns or ditched and crenellated garden walls, for almost every house in Derry was a separate fortress, planned and built with an eye to defensive warfare.

But they passed on scathless, down the unpaved and unlighted thoroughfares, between the dark sod-bawns, the ditches and palisades, the grim gateways and loopholed walls of the new, English fortress-city.

Chapter 9.

A PROPHECY—A MILITARY EXECUTION.

The next day was spent by O'Doherty and his friends in zealous search and careful enquiry into the dark mystery of Shiel O'Brasil's disappearance; but the result only served to strengthen the sad conviction that the poor youth had met his doom from the military marauders of Derry in the old dun of Aileach.

But all through that day there came no tidings from the Governor of Derry. Next morning, however, just after Sir Cahir and his friends had risen from their restless couches, and, having swallowed a hasty breakfast, had assembled in the great hall for further consultation, a mounted courier thundered at the gate of Buncrana Castle.

He bore a polite message from Sir George Paulett to O'Doherty and MacLaughlin, requesting them to attend him at his house in Derry, at the hour of noon, precisely, to see an act of stern justice done on those who, after zealous investigation, had been proved guilty of O'Brasil's death; and concluding with a request that in deference to his feelings and those of his soldiers, the two gentlemen invited should confine themselves to one personal attendant each.

O'Doherty and MacLaughlin signified their assent in terms equally courteous, and the messenger departed on the spur.

"Let me be your esquire, Cahir," cried O'Hanlon, "for by my soul I trust not yonder dark-lipped Governor!"

"I think, gentlemen, there is small need for such unusual precaution," said MacLaughlin, a little stiffly. "It is unlike honourable men to be so dubious of their neighbours. I will choose to ride, without any escort.

"And I, too, will ride alone," said Sir Cahir, his fiery spirit somewhat nettled by the remarks of his old friend. "If I trust George Paulett little, by heaven I fear him less! Come, Chieftain of Carn-gall, the noon draws nigh, it is already time we were in the saddle, with our horses' heads turned towards the Foyle.

When Sir Cahir and his friend arrived at Derry a strange and startling sight was presented before their eyes. In the parade, at the southern side of the city, all the troops of the garrison were drawn up, forming three sides of a square, facing inwards; while in the centre of the open space two graves were dug, side by side.

O'Doherty inquired the meaning of these ominous preparations, but was shortly and sullenly referred to the Governor. Sir Cahir and his friend, therefore, proceeded straight to Paulett's house, and on their arrival found the sombre knight pacing his hall in a state of great apparent perturbation.

"My friends," he began, abruptly, "I have kept my word. The investigation has been completed, and the guilty ones discovered. It has been proved too clearly that O'Brasil has been really slain.

"Four of my soldiers had chased a wolf into the dun of Aileach, and shot it there. O'Brasil had also been in pursuit of the beast; he, also, had fired, and he insisted that the death-shot had been delivered by him. He drew his sword and set upon them, whereupon two of my soldiers raised their musketoons and shot him—dead! They then dragged his body down the mountain, and flung it into Lough Swilly. That, in brief, is the confession of the unhappy men. The culprits are two of my best and bravest soldiers, but honour and justice must be vindicated. They die when the clock points to the hour of noon! To see this execution, and to bear witness to my good faith, I have invited you here to-day."

"Come, gentlemen," he said, hastily, "if you would witness the last act of this miserable tragedy,"—then, to MacLaughlin—"lend me your arm, sir, I beseech you! Your presence alone affords me the courage necessary to pass through this painful

ordeal !”

“May I see and speak with these wretched culprits?” inquired O’Doherty, as he walked with Paulett and MacLaughlin to the place of execution.

“Their last hour is at hand,” answered Paulett; “they are with the chaplain. Would it be generous to disturb them in that solemn and awful moment ?”

“No, I admit,” returned Sir Cahir; “yet, I would fain hear from their own lips how they despatched my poor, gallant friend, and where they flung his body.”

“Into the strait, near the Isle of Inch, at ebb-tide,” replied Paulett, again turning his head aside, to conceal a treacherous smile.

At the same moment the Provost-sergeant and his guard appeared, leading the prisoners—two tall, young men dressed in the uniform of Paulett’s troopers, with their hands pinioned behind their backs. They looked around as if imploring mercy or seeking succour, and their gaze fell on O’Doherty, whose stately height and gallant bearing rendered him always a conspicuous figure. The two ill-fated men instantly dropped on their knees, with a wild, but wordless cry of supplication that went straight to the generous heart of the youthful chief.

“Forgive these unfortunates, Sir George Paulett !” he cried, “pardon them—Let their sentence be commuted to some milder punishment !”

Paulett turned on the young chieftain with a covert glance of fury. Then he wheeled towards his man and threw up his arms impatiently.

“Proceed ! proceed !” he shouted.

Already the prisoners’ eyes were bandaged by the nimble fingers of the Provost-sergeant; in a moment they were placed on their feet, with the open graves behind them. A platoon of twelve musketeers advanced from the centre, and halted within twelve paces of the doomed men.

Twelve lines of red flames leaped out from the muzzles of the twelve levelled muskets. A hoarse, rattling crash pealed through the clear air, waking all the deep echoes of the fortress city; and at the same moment the two blindfolded and pinioned men fell backwards into the open graves prepared to receive them, each

pierced by six leaden bullets.

Grieved, shocked, sick at heart, and with a strange and inexplicable sensation of dissatisfaction and disquiet possessing all his faculties, Sir Cahir O'Doherty took MacLaughlin's arm, and turned abruptly from the scene of death. Hurriedly mounting his black steed the young chieftain took the road to Buncrana, and soon left the dark city of the Sassenach many a mile behind.

Chapter 10.

IN THE PRISON VAULTS—A RESPITE FROM DEATH.

When Red Richard and the soldiers under his direction bore the inanimate form of Shiel O'Brasil into the Governor's house, entering by a postern-door which communicated directly with the prison vaults below, they were met in the narrow passage leading therto by a red-haired maiden.

"What now, Dicko?" she said, addressing the burly esquire, as he stumbled forward under his heavy load. "Whom have we here, and what new piece of devilry is this thou'rt into?"

"Nought that concerns you, sister mine," returned Red Richard; "'tis only a dead carcase for the cord and sack."

"Newly hanged?" questioned the girl, in startled tones, as she bent forward and let the light of a lantern she carried flash on O'Brasil's face.

"Newly hanged, and cut-down this minute from the gateway arch. We were interrupted, and the dog's swing, you see, was somewhat short."

"Where are you taking him?" asked Muriel Corbett, putting her beautiful white hand on O'Brasil's livid temple.

"To the vaults below, where the thing shall lie until it be taken out for burial."

"Why drag a dead body down so many steep and slippery steps, when you shall have to drag it up anon? Leave it here!"

As Muriel Corbett spoke she unlocked a narrow door in the wall of the stone-arched passage they were threading, revealing a small

prison room, designed for captives whom it was not desirable to treat with rigour, and which contained a bed and a few articles of common necessity.

"You are right, Muriel," returned Red Richard. "Ods heart ! you're a girl of sense ! In with it, knaves ! Throw the d——d thing down here—so !"

The body of O'Brasil was tossed unceremoniously on the stone floor, Muriel Corbett promptly assisting in the rough work; but the head her white hands supported was laid down very gently on the hard pavement.

"Lock the door and let no one enter here," said Red Richard, as he turned to leave the room.

"I know how to lock a door," answered Muriel, sullenly.

She was kneeling over the prostrate form of O'Brasil, all her rich red hair falling about her, like a veil; she had loosened his tunic, and her firm, white hand felt over the region of his heart.

"Ay," said Red Richard, with a sinister smile, "'twas you who locked little Erna Burke into this very room, and——but, Mahound ! is there still life in him ?" he cried, interrupting himself, as he noticed Muriel's action, and striding back into the room. "Stand aside, girl," he added, drawing a pistol from his girdle, "two brass bullets in the caitiff's ear will settle all doubt on that point for ever."

Muriel sprang to her feet, and, flinging back her red hair, stood over the body of O'Brasil.

"There is no doubt to be settled," she said, calmly, yet with glittering eyes. "Fool ! keep your powder for better work than shooting at dead men !"

"Nay, but are you certain, Muriel ?"

"Didn't you hang him ?" cried the girl, fiercely. "Ghoul ! are you not content with slaughtering the living, but you would batten on the dead ?"

"When did you turn virtuous ?" sneered Red Richard, "and where is the use of making a pother ? If the dog is dead, why, let him lie. Come away, girl, and get me a bowl of sack."

"Go summon the pantler to do your pleasure," returned Muriel, ungraciously, as she pushed her brother out of the room before her and locked the door carefully. "I'm bound on other business."

Hours afterwards, when the grey light of dawn began to creep

through the barred window of the prison-room, its pale rays seemed to brighten as they fell on the red maiden bending over the bed on which lay the bruised and blackened form of Shiel O'Brasil.

Muriel Corbett's beautiful, strange eyes, and her beautiful, stormy, passionate face were now wondrously soft and sad and anxious, as in the deep stillness of the prison cell she bent her ear to O'Brasil's lips to listen. All night long she had stood there by the bedside, striving with unwearying zeal and skill to fan the vital spark which she had found still flickering in the young man's frame; and at last her patient efforts were rewarded. At last, as the dawn lightened in the prison-room, O'Brasil's faint but regular breathing announced to his attentive nurse that success was certain.

Shiel O'Brasil felt, as in a pleasing dream, the cool, velvet-soft hand bathing his hot temples, and stirring his clotted hair; and at last, as life and strength grew within him, he opened his eyes, all dim and bloodshot, and strove to turn their gaze on the ministering angel of whose soft presence he began to be dimly sensible.

But a dull, red haze floated before his still clouded vision. He saw Muriel's hair, like a mist of ruddy gold, with the slanting sun-rays shimmering through it. He heard a low murmur in his ear that breathed of rest, protection, peace. He felt a gentle breath on his swollen cheek, and soft fingers dropping balm about him.

This, he understood, was a woman's presence. The dreadful episodes of the great night had not yet dawned on his dormant faculties; and with a great joy at his heart, he let his dim eyes close once more, and murmured—"Una!"

But the loved name he tried to utter, died out in a hoarse rattle in O'Brasil's bruised and injured throat. Better for him, perhaps, that it was so!

"He knows me!" murmured Muriel, "poor boy, he remembers me! Ah"—with a proud heave of her full bosom—"no man ever forgets Muriel Corbett who sees her once!"

Next day, thanks to a robust constitution, and the unwearying ministrations of his new-found friend, O'Brasil felt much better.

His mind had become clear once more; the mists had left his eyes; and though still helplessly weak from loss of blood and the brutal usage to which he had been subjected, he was quite sufficiently recovered to feel renewed interest in the life that had been

restored to him—the life he held by such precarious tenure.

He had just awakened from a long, refreshing sleep, but he was lying still with his eyes closed, meditating on the dreadful predicament in which he was placed, recalling all the events that had led up to it, and speculating with no very sanguine soul as to what was likely to follow when a cool, soft hand was laid caressingly on his brow, and gentle fingers pushed back the damp hair that clung about his temples.

“Who are you?” he asked, in tones which his peculiar position rendered very pathetic, “Why has your gentle heart taken such pains to restore a life which any moment may see ruthlessly sacrificed?”

“I am Muriel Corbett,” answered the girl—“nay, start not at that name; let the sister’s service atone for the brother’s cruelty.”

“It shall—it does!” cried O’Brasil, warmly, as he captured the fair hand that still rested lingeringly amidst his dark hair. “But tell me, my kind preserver, wherefore have you nursed back my ill-starred life, when, haply, this very hour I may have to brook once more the pains of death?”

“That is true,” returned Muriel, with a shiver, “they may take your life, despite my best endeavours. No one but myself yet knows that you are alive. But”—clenching her white teeth—“they shall not murder you now, if I can help it!”

“You can help it!” cried O’Brasil, fervently. “My guardian angel, I feel that you can save me.”

“I will try,” said Muriel, slowly; “yet I do not know—there is only one way—but I shall do my best.”

“Muriel, you will help me to escape?”

“Not now; you are too weak; you could neither walk, ride, nor fight. It would be impossible, in broad daylight, to escape the keen eyes of Paulett and my brother, even if we could pass the city guards and the patrols and pickets on the roads beyond. Besides, you are far too weak yet to bear removal.”

“How long will you be able to conceal me here—to keep the fact of my existence undiscovered?”

“To-night or to-morrow night they will come to bury you,” answered Muriel, pointedly.

“A pleasant prospect!” exclaimed O’Brasil, with a shrug. “And what then, fair Muriel?”

"Leave it to me."

"Be it so, cailin ruagh, my life, my all, are in your gentle hands."

Muriel laid her hand lightly on O'Brasil's brow, by way of farewell, and the youth carried it gallantly to his lips. It was merely the expression of his earnest gratitude; perhaps beautiful Muriel Corbett believed it something more.

The girl crossed the cell with her free, swinging step, let herself out, and locked the door with care, and Shiel O'Brasil was alone in the prison room—alone with his terrible anxieties and misgivings; with his bodily weakness; his thoughts that could find no rest.

It was hours before Muriel returned. She entered hurriedly, carrying some refreshments, and locked the cell-door with her usual precaution. She turned to O'Brasil with a flushed face and eyes gleaming strangely.

"Eat this," she said, tendering some wine and soup, and some crisp cakes that looked tempting in her delicate hands; "eat and get strong, and when you have finished, I will tell you what has happened."

"Why not tell me now," said O'Brasil, anxiously.

"Eat!" commanded the red maiden, with a half-tender, half-imperious gesture. "Sir Captain, I am your nurse and jailer, and must be obeyed."

"You have but to command me," rejoined O'Brasil, with a smile; and concealing his disquiet as best he might, he addressed himself obediently to the good things set before him by his wilful nurse.

When the repast was finished he leaned back on his pillows, feeling grateful and refreshed, but looking all the eagerness he felt to hear the promised news.

"I will tell you now," said Muriel, in answer to the mute appeal. "In the first place, you are dead and buried—inasmuch as you have been shot in the dun of Aileach and drowned in the waters of Lough Swilly. Such, at least, is the decision of our most puissant Governor, and who shall dare gainsay it? The Governor has duped your friends. To them and to the world you are as dead as Paulett thinks you. He has imposed on O'Doherty by a specious pretence of justice. He affects to have discovered the men who have taken your life, and last night, amid mad carousing, he and his creatures held a sham court-martial on these two poor wretches."

"Dhia !" exclaimed O'Brasil, excitedly, "this villain's villainy is well nigh past belief ! But how will it all end ?"

"It has ended !" she said, in strange, deep tones. "Hark, what do you hear ?"

"I hear the rattle of a volley of musketry," returned the young captain of horse, as that moment the deep detonation of exploding fire-arms shook the prison walls.

"That is the firing of the platoon in the parade—yes, it has ended !" said Muriel, slowly. "Two men have just been shot in their open graves for compassing your death."

"Good heavens ! then what am I to think—what am I to understand from this execution ?"

"Paulett, I know, is not a soldier; he has no notions of discipline; no regard for the morale of his men, but this last outrage—soul within me ! what can it mean ?"

"I will tell you," answered Muriel, slowly, "and then you shall comprehend what manner of man is he into whose hands your evil fate hath thrown you. The story, in brief, is this :

"There were two fishermen of Torry in the vaults below, whom our soldiers had seized one day in the market place in a drunken frolic, and whose creels of fish they had confiscated.

"Last night Paulett had their tongues cut out that they might not speak. To-day they were dressed out in military trappings, and thus, mute and pinioned, they have been led out to the parade and shot; while your friends who were present believe that they have witnessed the execution of your murderers."

"Great God !" exclaimed O'Brasil, "was there no one to expose this fiendish act ?"

"None. The good citizens of Derry have wisely learned to take no note of the Commander's doings. The city functionaries are all creatures of Paulett's choosing, and all corrupt and criminal as the chief himself. The garrison are all mere braves and cut-throats, whose trade is to rob and slay, cheat and steal. Then, to guard against the chance of recognition and discovery, O'Doherty and his friends were asked to attend with only one servitor each; but they did better, the chiefs came alone; and the two poor Islanders from the far north were quite unknown to any."

Shiel O'Brasil groaned heavily.

"It is time the walls of Derry were levelled with the earth !" he

cried. "God of heaven! 'tis a marvel the waves of Lough Foyle do not rise and overwhelm it, as the depths of the Dead Sea buried the Cities of Sin!"

One short hour after —out in the parade ground, the mossy mould had been shovelled in, and the graves closed over the warm bodies of the two hapless Islanders. The ground was deserted by the military; and the good people of Derry, well used to horrors, were walking, with light hearts, over the two new-made graves. Sir Cahir O'Doherty and MacLaughlin had gone away, deceived and blind-folded, and Paulett returned to his house triumphant and rejoicing. In the narrow passage leading to the prison-vaults Muriel Corbett met him.

She was richly dressed in soft, white silk; her stomacher blazed with jewels; diamond stars were in her rich, red hair; diamond pendants in her small, delicate ears; her neck, her arms, her bosom, which were of that transparent whiteness frequently found in conjunction with red hair, looked almost dazzling.

She met the dark Governor with her sweetest, sauciest smile, and stopping before him, where the rays of a suspended lamp fell full on her splendid form, she put her two white hands playfully on his shoulders, and raised her bright eyes to his with their most seductive glance.

'Twas long since Muriel Corbett had looked on him like that and Paulett's sensuous heart was stirred by the girl's glorious beauty, as his vanity was flattered by her unusual graciousness.

"Muriel," he said, putting his arms around her with a caressing motion, "I vow, by all the gods, you are nearly as beautiful as the coy MacLaughlin."

"Once you thought me more beautiful than any, George," said Muriel, softly.

"And, by Heaven, I'd think so still, if you always looked on me with such gentle eyes; and once this girl's rich dower is in my hands—but what of the prisoners to-day?"

"All well."

"And the dead body?—I have just given orders for its burial in the fortress ditch to-night; and I—I am going now to have a look at it!"

"He was your rival, mayhap?"

"Yea, by Mahound, the favoured one ! But ere long, my girl, I shall have full revenge."

"Nay, how can you, when you have slain your rival ?" said Muriel, calmly. "You ought to have let him live to witness the full consummation of your triumph."

"By Beelzebub, yes !" cried Paulett, his eyes blazing suddenly.

"What will your success matter to him when he is a cold corpse in the fortress ditch ?" proceeded the red maiden, in her rich, deep, incisive tones.

"Why did no one suggest this to me in time ?" cried Paulett, fiercely. "'After all, only a woman understands the true science of revenge."

"You never thought of speaking to me about it, George. I have seen many a one hung up in neck-weeds and cut down, half gone; had you spoken to me, even at the eleventh hour, I should have advised you to do this by him, and—coax him back to life."

"I would I had, Muriel ! My schemes prosper; my hopes thrive apace. I shall soon be the sole master of such beauty and treasure as 'twill dazzle thy bright eyes to look upon ! Ah, if O'Brasil could only see it ! By the rood, I would give a bag of MacLaughlin's gold to have him alive in the prison-vaults this moment ?"

"Do you mean it, in good sooth ?"

"I do mean it; but what avails it—the deed is done."

"Would you thank me, George, if I told you I had won your rival back to life—brought him back for a little while, to be a witness of your triumph over him ?"

Paulett's eyes flashed wildly.

"Muriel, you are a witch !" he cried, catching the girl in his arms and giving her a fierce embrace. "But, tell me, have you done it—have you actually done it ?"

Muriel looked into his face with her most captivating smile.

"Would you thank me, George ? Would you call me clever ? Would you say your Muriel had done well ?" she demanded, with the innocent, coquettish air of a girl who had just executed some pretty little service for the man she loved.

"I would call you a treasure—by Mahound, a girl after my own heart ! But, tell me at once, does he live ?"

"He lives—that is, he may live, with care ;" answered Muriel, cautiously.

"Where is he? Let me see him!"

"He is in there, under lock and key. He is barely breathing and still insensible," returned the girl, mendaciously. "Leave him to me, George, for a little longer, the slightest shock would undo all I have been at such pains to achieve."

"It is well, Muriel. Who but yourself would have thought of this? But guard him, girl! Guard him—by heaven!—as you would your life!"

"As I would my life," answered Muriel, with a flash of her gold-bright eyes. "And now come, my George, after all this hard labour in your service, I want to rest. Come! these musty vaults smell like a very charnel-house."

With her white arm entwined around him, a smile curling her full lip, and the deep orange lights playing in her strange, bright eyes, the red-haired siren led the savage Governor from the passages, and Sheil O'Brasil had received another precarious respite from death.

Chapter 11.

IRENE'S MESSAGE—IN THE CASTLE OF CARNGALL— PAULETT'S PROPOSAL.

A year has passed since the events recorded in our last chapter—a year big with destiny for Ireland and her people. In that year, at one disastrous stroke, Ulster was shorn of the flower of her old nobility.

From the moment the sword was laid down on the northern border, and the Northern nobles were received into "the King's peace," the King had surrounded his gallant lieges with an army of spies, assassins, and "discoverers;" and the pistolier, the poisoner, the garroter—the concocter of sham conspiracies, Spanish invasions, and home-rebellions—speedily made the lives of these unfortunate gentlemen too great a burden to be borne in their own land.

Every reader of Irish history knows how one wild September day, when the winds were tearing through the North Channel and the waves running mountains high, a sorrowful ship dropped down Lough Swilly, bearing the noblest and the saddest cargo that ever before or since floated on the deep bosom of the Lake of Shadows.

The last princely O'Neill was on board that venturous bark—the heir of a nation's history, the offspring of a race of kings. There, too, was the last O'Donnell; the last gallant Maguire from the stately banks of Erne. Of all the northern nobles of note Sir Cahir O'Doherty now alone remained, and round him also the iron meshes of tyranny were closing swiftly.

It was a dull evening in early spring, some months after that fateful ship had sailed out of Lough Swilly. On that evening Sir Cahir O'Doherty, looking weary and travel-stained, rode at a foot pace along the road leading westward to Buncrana.

The chieftain's handsome riding-suit was splashed with mud, and under the brim of his Spanish hat, with its wide heron's plume, his blue eyes looked unwontedly dark and stern.

Sir Cahir was just returning from a journey to Dublin, whither he had travelled to clear himself before the Deputy of some false charges made against him by Paulett, as well as to complain of the outrageous conduct of that truculent official, who had of late made himself particularly offensive to O'Doherty.

Chichester, however, who thought it high time to throw aside his mask of friendliness, had answered the young chieftain's just complaints by immuring him for three days in a dungeon in Birmingham Tower, from whence he was only released at the earnest suit of Lord Gormanstown, who readily entered into heavy recognisances for his young brother-in-law's future "good-behaviour," and as readily promised, in his behalf, much more than that proud noble was himself aware of.

Burning with wild anger, disappointment, and humiliation, Sir Cahir passed out of the dungeon doors, and mounting his horse turned his face to his own free and beloved North.

Lord Gormanstown, standing at his stirrup, whispered earnestly into his ear, as he grasped his hand at parting :—

"Never again let the d—d gates of Dublin Castle close on thy living form, for if they do, by the Lord Harry, they shall only open to pass out your corpse !"

From this bootless and exasperating journey Sir Cahir was now returning, with what feelings may be imagined.

He had just breasted the last slope in the rugged road, and the grey towers of Buncrana arose before him, when a boy riding a small, shaggy, mountain pony came up the ascent at a brisk canter, and drew rein as he approached the chief. The boy took a small packet from his pouch and handed it to Sir Cahir, with a respectful salutation.

"What is this, mo Bouchal?" inquired O'Doherty, wearily checking his horse.

"I was to give it into your hands alone," replied the boy, "so,

when I found you absent, I was returning with it to Carn gall. It is from the Lady Irene."

The lad put spurs to his shaggy beast and dashed off at a good pace, towards the castle; while Sir Cahir, letting his bridal fall loosely on his charger's neck, proceeded to unfold Irene's packet.

It was a small parcel delicately wrapped in white silk, and tied with a white ribbon, on which was knotted a cornelian heart, engraved around with the legend:—"United in death."

Sir Cahir untied the knot with gentle touch, and allowed the cornelian to slip into his hand.

"So Rene dun is going to be a Carmelite!" he murmured—"a beautiful passion-flower changed to a stiff, white lily!—In sooth, these things surpass my understanding."

The silken wrapper contained only a small sheet of paper, closely written in Irene's delicate hand, and began thus, in the quaint phraseology of the time:—

"My commendations unto thee, O'Doherty!

"I am about to retire to the Convent of Carmelites, in Valladolid," it proceeded. "A merchant ship will leave Lough Foyle two days hence, and in that ship, greatly to my comfort, I have secured a secret passage. But for my long illness this step would have been taken sooner; now, however, I thank heaven, there exists no obstacle to my earnest wish. But for my long illness, too, I should have told you something that ought to have been told ere now, but which can no longer be left unsaid:

"Sir Arthur Chichester is your bitterest enemy. He is plotting to deprive you of lands and life, and to involve you and yours in universal ruin. He has set his avaricious eye on your territory of Innishowen, and will labour to possess himself of it by any means!

"Doubt not, Cahir, that this is true. Suffice it to say that Chichester himself found an opportunity of making known his base intentions to me, on the night of the ball in Buncrana Castle.

"He has threatened to speak evil of me if I should venture to expose him. If ever you hear such evil spoken, I pray you to remember that Rene dun Magennis risked vengeance and calumny to warn and serve you.

"IRENE."

Sir Cahir read this letter through with feelings of a tumultuous character. Rage against Chichester, his crooked policy, his slimy

and treacherous villainy, mingled with heartfelt sorrow at the thought of being parted forever from the sweet friend of his youth and manhood; the lovely and brilliant woman whose gracious presence had shone like a white star in his life's orbit through all its happiest and sunniest years; and who filled, perhaps, a larger place in the sphere of his affections than he himself had realised until he found that he was about to lose her.

Meanwhile, the yellow evening sunlight was tinging softly the grey, old turrets of Carn gall Castle, looking down from its lofty and wave-worn rock on the throbbing waters of Lough Foyle.

Within the castle, in the quaint, old hall, the amber beams were falling softly through the narrow, splayed, and iron-grated windows—falling in long level, dusk-gold bars on the straw matting that covered the oaken floor; on the black, oaken beams and rafters; and on the rough masonry of the naked walls, where it showed grimly between the adornments that were disposed thereon.

A huge bog-wood fire glowed within the ancient andirons at one end of the hall; and on the wide hearth in front was stretched a blind and aged wolf-dog, side by side with a great boarhound—a formidable-looking beast, strong-limbed heavy-jawed, pendulous-eared, who slept with one red eye half open.

The furniture proper of the hall consisted of heavy, square-seated, black-oak chairs, adorned with knobs and carving; tripod stools, buffets, bearing sparkling wines of Malvoisie and Bourdeaux, with tankards of silver set with carved ambers of Irish crystals; methers of red yew, and drinking-horns with gold and silver rims.

On this evening the hall of MacLaughlin was deserted, save for one fair presence. On a platform, at the upper end of the apartment, which was raised one step above the level of the floor sat Irene Magennis, alone, before her harp. Irene had been ill for many a weary month after her return from Buncrana Castle—ill almost unto death. But slowly the dreadful fever that had stricken her burnt itself out; and then for many more months, the girl lay, like a pale lily—lay with her slender hands folded loosely, and her dark-fringed lids languidly drooping on her white cheeks, living and breathing, though hardly aware of it, and, in truth, far from wishing it; while the castle hall was

hushed; and the rough retainers of MacLaughlin trod shoeless and on tiptoe along the stone-flagged passages, hardly allowing themselves to breathe, lest they should disturb the gentle lady who was so loved by all.

Then gradually, as the spring brightened, the vital tide waxed stronger in Irene's veins; the red grew on her lips once more, and a faint rose-flush crept into her transparent cheeks; and as day followed day, the life from which she, herself, would have parted gladly, was nursed back to her by loving and zealous care.

Often since her convalescence, Sir Cahir had ridden across the hills of Carn gall, to inquire for her; but under one excuse or another, Irene had avoided seeing him. Her poor, weak, human heart had betrayed her once—she was resolved that it never should again. In two short days she was to sail to Spain, and there in the quiet and holy haven of rest she had chosen, she hoped to hide forever her love and sorrow.

That morning, ignorant of the young chieftain's absence in Dublin, she had despatched her farewell message to Sir Cahir O'Doherty—a message received by him as we have seen.

With a sweet, soft smile curling her lovely lip, and making her wonderously beautiful to look on, Irene Magennis struck the harp, and, for the first time since the old bright days, she let her full heart float out in waves of song.

She sang on and on, softly, richly, sweetly, yet with an undertone of wild sadness thrilling through every note, the songs O'Doherty and she had often sung together—the songs Sir Cahir loved.

"It is the last—last time I shall ever sing them!" was the thought present to her mind.

The next moment Una MacLaughlin, who had entered the hall some time previously, unseen by the fair singer, moved forward from a window-recess within which she had stood to hear Irene's music. Una put her white arms softly around her foster-sister's slender form, and, kneeling beside her, tenderly drew her dark head down on her bosom and let her weep there in silence.

Since Irene's illness the previous relations between the two girls seemed to have been reversed. Formerly Irene had taken the part of guide, consoler, and counsellor to her more youthful foster-sister: now it was Una who fulfilled that gentle office.

While Irene lay with the shadows of death about her, in her delirious ravings Una had discovered the sad secret of Irene's ill-starred love, which before she had half-suspected. And in that long and anxious year during which she had acted as nurse and comfortress, Una had found in her ever wakeful and tender sympathy with Irene's sorrow the best possible antidote against her own.

"There is many a light love, Rene dun, that comes with the sunshine and goes with the rain," said Una, sadly, "but alas, for the love that lasts forever—the flower that will not die. I shall miss you so much, Rene," added the fair girl, wistfully, "oh, if you could have stayed—you know how poor Gormanstown"—

"Hush!" interrupted Irene, raising a warning finger, while a slight blush stained her olive cheek, "if you mention him, Una, I must, in return, remind you of your own hopelessly enamoured knight."

"Paulett? Irene, that man is my evil destiny. Could anything be more hateful, more wearying than his ceaseless persecution? I know he has more than once asked my father for me, and notwithstanding his terrible vow at the Three Shrines, he has not at all given him a definite denial."

"Paulett has gained great influence over our father; I trust he may not yet induce him to consent," said Irene, "it is a catastrophe I have always dreaded."

Una smiled proudly.

"Sir George Paulett shall require my consent," she answered, "and my father shall find that the blood of the Loughlinagh has not yet turned to water in her daughter's veins."

As Una spoke steps sounded on the winding, stone stairs leading upward to the great hall, and the voice of Bryan MacLaughlin was heard, together with the deep, grating accents of the Knight of Derry, now softened to their mildest key. The two girls sprang to their feet with a mutual glance of affright, for both feared and disliked the rude Governor with an almost equal intensity.

"Let us go!" whispered Irene, with a shudder, as the memory of that dreadful night when she last heard Sir George Paulett's voice on the dim, winding stairs of the old tower in Buncrana Castle flashed suddenly upon her, in all its horrors.

Una threw her arm around her foster-sister's waist, and together

they glided towards the door.

Too late ! Paulett had already turned the last curve of the spiral stair, and when the fair fugitives reached the door he stood smiling and bowing before them.

"What, little night-birds, all in the dark ?" cried MacLaughlin, advancing cheerily. "Lights here, seneschal," he added, addressing a venerable official who had followed him up the stairs to receive his orders. "Lights and more fire; and bid the cup-bearer bring refreshments."

The seneschal bent his white head and departed on his mission, and MacLaughlin ushered his guest into the hall.

The moment Paulett passed the threshold, the boarhound, which was stretched at full length before the glowing fire, suddenly bounded to his feet with a deep-mouthed howl, that reverberated through all the castle; and with his red eyes on fire and his heavy jaws open, showing all his sharp, white, terrible teeth, he rushed at the Governor as he might have done at a wild beast.

Paulett sprang back with a half-suppressed oath, and attempted to draw his sword; but with a yell the boarhound was upon him. In the same instant Paulett measured his length on the floor, and the powerful dog was above him, with red, open jaws and tearing tusks.

"Off ! you brute, off ! Hah ! back, Doltagh. Hah !" shouted MacLaughlin, slashing at the furious beast with a heavy dog-whip.

But the hound heeded neither voice nor whip. Irene sprang forward and flung her arms around the boarhound's neck. "Drop him ! drop him, sir ! down ! Doltagh, down !" she cried, in her clear, incisive tones.

Instantly, yet with a lingering and threatening growl, the dog relinquished his hold of the prostrate Governor, and crept submissively to Irene's feet. The young girl took hold of the hound's long pendulous ear and led him outside the door, the animal still casting red, backward glances, and uttering low growls at the object of his late attack.

"Take the brute away and whip him within an inch of his life!" cried MacLaughlin, from the hall, as the seneschal appeared, followed by servants with lights and refreshments.

"Yes, whip him, seneschal—so !" said Irene, in low tones, as

she smilingly caressed the dog's broad head. "Doltagh does not know the Governor of Derry from one of his natural enemies of the wood or wold."

The old seneschal took hold of the dog's collar with a twinkle of intelligence in the keen, grey orbs that gleamed under his white and shaggy eyebrow, and led him away down the winding stone stairs.

Paulett, meanwhile, livid with rage and terror, had scrambled to his feet; and when the tapers were lit in the old, silver girandoles, it could be seen that his dress, if not his person, had sustained serious injury. MacLaughlin was profuse, as he was sincere, in his expressions of regret for the untoward incident, and Paulett soon recovered himself sufficiently to master all outward appearance of ill-humour.

Much to Irene's annoyance, the major part of the unwelcome visitor's attention was directed towards herself. By reason of her long illness, and since her convalescence, her constant and careful avoidance of the Governor's society, Paulett had not seen her since that never-to-be-forgotten night when Chichester had forced her to pass out before him from the turret-room; and now his look and tone of easy assurance and of covert insolence showed Irene but too clearly that he meant to presume on his knowledge of that secret episode.

"I owe my escape to your courage and kindness, fair Irene," he said, blandly. "I hope an opportunity of returning, in some small measure, so graceful and so great a service."

"The boarhound is mine," returned Irene, with studied hauteur. "You owe me no thanks for calling him off, and I am hardly likely to ask or require any future service at your hands."

"And yet my Lord Deputy is pleased to account me amongst his most faithful, if humble friends," said Paulett, speaking in low, and deeply meaning tones, "to be the friend of his friends, and especially yours, sweet Irene, is surely a blameless, if unhappily an unattainable ambition."

"I am no friend to the Lord Deputy, and have no desire to be on terms of amity with those who are," replied Irene, her dark eyes flashing stormily, and an indignant flush springing to her cheeks.

"You are cruel!" ejaculated Paulett, in low, smooth, half-sneering tones, "but I can forgive anything in one so beautiful. If poor Chichester could see you now he would be ten times enslaved. I must advertise him of your happy recovery—it will be joyful news to his anxious ear. I had a post from him this morning; and he speaks with rapture of that night—that hour—in the turret-room, and he prays you when will it be your gentle pleasure to"—

Irene arose, crimson from brow to chin, and quivering with wild anger to her very finger-tips. She grasped the back of her chair with both hands so tightly that the hard carving of the black oak-wood left its deep imprint on her delicate skin. Standing thus for a moment or two that seemed an age, with Paulett's bold eye bent upon her in insolent admiration, Irene strove to master her passion before trusting herself to speak.

"Father—Una," she said at length in tones that trembled despite every effort, "I feel a little indisposed. I think I will retire now."

"You have over-exerted yourself, my pet," said MacLaughlin, anxiously, "and the scene with that treacherous hound! I must have the beast chained in future."

"Poor Doltagh is not treacherous," answered Irene. "His enmity is bold and open. You see, he mistook Sir George Paulett, somehow, for a wolf." Good night, dear father."

Irene's swelling heart could bear no more. She turned quickly and hurried from the room, and Una gladly seized the opportunity of accompanying her.

Left alone with his guest, MacLaughlin invited the latter to draw up to the table, on which an appetising repast was now laid; and the stately old castellan proceeded to dispense his hospitality with all the genial courtesy and overflowing good-will that distinguished him.

Paulett, than whom no one loved better the good things fortune gave, fell valiantly on his host's malvoisis and venison; but at the same time neglected not to put MacLaughlin in the best possible humour with himself and all the world by adroitly drawing him to enlarge on his favourite topic.

This time his own family history was the subject chosen; and with sparkling eye and swelling breast the old chieftain proceeded to recount to his apparently attentive and sympathetic listener the

ancient glories of the "Loughlinagh."

"I take the greatest possible interest in everything that pertains to your family, sir," said Paulett, in earnest tones, "and it is my dearest hope that I may one day study its history with the advantage of its loveliest member for my instructress."

"Still dreaming of that, Paulett?" said the old chieftain, with an indulgent smile.

"I can think or dream of nothing else," replied the Governor, with well assumed emotion. "I beseech you, sir, remember your own youth, and put an end to the cruel suspense that I have lately suffered. I love your daughter; I revere and honour you—believe me, sir, my affection for you is that of a son; may I not hope that you will one day regard me as such?"

"My dear Paulett," returned MacLaughlin, warmly, "if an old man's affection and esteem could solve the problem, you are already answered in the affirmative; but—nay, hear me out—there are other things. My daughter—have you asked her?"

"I thought it right to be provided first with your sanction, sir," answered Paulett, mendaciously, "but I flatter myself that Una—hem!—is not indifferent to my worthless self."

"I am not disappointed in you, Sir George," said MacLaughlin, approvingly; "yours is an honourable mind."

"I trust so, sir," replied the bold intriguer; "may I then hope for your consent to my suit with Una?"

"Subject to one condition, it shall not be withheld," replied the chieftain, graciously. "Fortune need not be an essential in my daughter's husband, though to that also my girl might reasonably aspire; for I may tell you that Una is possessed of wealth."

"Alas!" exclaimed Paulett, with profound dissimulation, "I never dreamt—I never guessed that that impediment should be in my way. I believed my dear Una to be the penniless daughter of an illustrious but fallen house."

"She is, indeed, the daughter of a fallen house," returned MacLaughlin, "Some twenty months ago the heir of a Scottish house laid an ancient cornet at my daughter's feet. For the cornet I cared little; but the MacCallum Mor is of a kingly Celtic stock, being descended from the three Collas, who in Ireland's older days—"

"Well, she refused him, my Una; and—I recount it with shame

—for sake of a waif—a nobody—a nameless youth, picked up at sea in infancy; one who might be, for aught we know, the son of some Flanders butterman, or French trader in silk and yarn”——

“O’Brasil?” interjected Paulett, grimly.

“Even so. Una was firm, and I was furious; I will admit it—furious!—for the first and last time, I trust, against my child. I vow to God, Sir George, as I have vowed before His three holiest shrines, I would rather have seen her at rest beside her dead mother, in the old churchyard of Moville, than living to disgrace her ancient name and race by such a base connection.”

“At the time I spoke of,” resumed MacLaughlin, “I made a solemn vow at the Three Shrines of Patrick, Brigid, and Columbkille that, since Una had refused an alliance so honourable, she should never contract one less so. Family, therefore, is the chief, I may say the sole, desideratum. I must be absolutely satisfied as to that point in any aspirant for my daughter’s hand.”

“Ours is an old English stock,” answered Paulett, in a bold and off-hand style, “though my father, Giles Paulett, a hearty Hampshire squire, bequeathed to me at his death little more of the world’s wealth than sufficed to purchase my Constableness of Derry, with the house, and ten quarters of land thereunto pertaining.”

If Paulett had spoken the truth he should have been obliged to admit that his father had bequeathed him nothing, and that the money with which his Governorship was purchased had been obtained by far less honourable means; as it was, his audacious story looked perfectly probable and truthful, and there was no one to contradict it.

“Wealth is nothing,” said MacLaughlin, with a wave of his hand. “we are on the question of family, sir, family. We have now reached your grandfather; pray, go on, my friend. Your grandfather was?”

“A sheep-dealer and a sheep-stealer, who died a martyr to his profession and principles outside the gate of a Hampshire bride-well,” was Paulett’s truthful but internal answer. Aloud he said, nonchalantly—

“My grandfather was the youngest son of an earl.”

“What earl? I have been looking up the English peerages since you last mentioned your wish to become a member of my family,

and I confess I could not see—but, pray proceed, Sir George; what earl?”

“Winchester,” answered Paulett, at random, and realising that he was getting into deeper water than he at all relished.

“What! Paulett of Winchester?”

“The same.”

“I beg your pardon, Sir George, but that gentleman is a marquis, you know. I thought you said earl?”

Paulett clenched his hands in silent rage, and inwardly consigned the dignitary in question to the hottest region he had ever heard of. But still preserving a bold front, he answered, carelessly—

“I ought to have said marquis—a mere slip of the tongue. My grandfather was the third son of the twentieth Marquis of Winchester—a very old and honourable stock.

During this speech Bryan MacLaughlin, arresting his silver goblet in its passage to his lips, stared at the Knight of Derry in blank and undisguised amazement.

“You are surely not aware, Sir Knight,” he said, slowly, and laying a peculiar and somewhat scornful emphasis on the word “knight,” “that the title you speak of was only created some three or four years ago, that its present wearer, who received his so-called ennoblement for a very disreputable piece of service, is the first Marquis of Winchester, and is still unmarried?”

Paulett, who for some minutes had felt that he was wading in rather dangerous waters, now saw that he had floundered hopelessly out of his depth; and, like a drowning man, he began to catch at straws.

“The documents of the King-at-Arms, from which you derive your information, are all frauds and forgeries,” he said doggedly. “I repeat it, and my word ought to be sufficient, my grandfather was the third son of the twentieth Marquis of Winchester.”

MacLaughlin set down his goblet with a crash that made the red wine dance within it, and all its carved crystals ring in their silver setting. He fixed his keen, blue eyes on the sullen face of his would-be son-in-law, and burst into a prolonged and hearty fit of laughter.

“Dhar mo lamh!” he exclaimed, between his bursts of merriment, “those marquises have multiplied at an amazing rate since

I crossed swords, with the first one, some ten years ago, under O'Donnell's Cross, in the fassaghs of Iar-Connaught ! It is plain, my friend, you dont know who your grandfather was—mo naire ! Sir George !—out on thee, Paulett !—your attempt to impose on Bryan MacLaughlin is as unworthy as it is fruitless !”

Paulett sprang to his feet, his face flushing, his eyes blazing, all his evil passions struggling to break through the mask that had been worn so long and so painfully, in MacLaughlin's presence.

“Listen to me Chieftain of Carn gall,” he cried in a voice quivering with suppressed rage. “Who my grandfather was matters nought to you. I am Governor of Derry. I have wealth, power, brilliant prospects; I have been made a knight since I came to Ireland; I shall be a viscount ere the year is dead. I ask you, Bryan MacLaughlin, for the last time, will you or will you not give me your daughter to share my dignities ?”

“I am truly sorry,” answered MacLaughlin, growing instantly serious, “both on your account and my own; but much as I esteem you personally (notwithstanding the petty ruse to which you have just descended), since you cannot satisfy my scruples on the question of family, your alliance with my daughter is not to be thought of.”

“Fool !” hissed Paulett, stamping on the floor, and giving furious vent to his long-suppressed passion. “Infernal, old dotard, have it so—by the eternal ! have it so ! You have rejected Paulett's friendship, and you shall feel his enmity.

“Keep your ladykins and keep your vows, then, while you may ! But, God-sonties, Paulett shall write a shrewd page yet in your genealogy. There shall be a second Dervorgail to account for, else trust me never !”

MacLaughlin sprang to his feet, his hand on his skene, and drew up his tall form haughtily.

“I am an old man, Sir George Paulett,” he said, looking at the insolent Governor with flashing eyes, “but the day was when you would not have dared thus to beard Bryan MacLaughlin in his own hall, nay, or insult even the humblest waiting woman who does him service.”

As MacLaughlin hurled this last contemptuous threat at his irate visitor, the latter struck his fist heavily on the table, making knives and trenchers, carved ambers, and silver-mounted drinking-horns

clatter on the oaken board.

"Wah, gray-bearded traitor!" he exclaimed, with a fury that now defied control. "I go, but I shall soon return, and, by God's death, you shall aby my coming!"

With this parting menace, Paulett turned and flung himself out of the hall.

MacLaughlin, with a frowning brow and lowering eye, stood listening to his heavy footsteps lumbering down the spiral stairs; then a few moments later, to the quick clash of his horse's hoofs on the pavement of the court-yard below, and thence out through the castle-gate, until the sounds died away on the Derry road.

Then the old man's anger appeared instantly to die out with the removal of the cause that had provoked it. He threw himself into his chair and flung back his frosted head with a philosophic and forgiving look.

"Poor plebeian rascal!" he exclaimed, "I can afford to pity him; and I do. He feels his failure, which is but natural. He tried to impose on me with his bogus pedigree, but"—with a laugh and a shrewd head-shake—"it would not do, he found, with Bryan MacLaughlin!"

Chapter 12.

THE FOE IN THE FASSAGH.—A MIDNIGHT FORAY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

The central district of Innishowen is even now a wild and desolate region; a region through which one may travel for miles without catching sight of a human habitation.

At the date of our story this lonely fassagh was covered with a wild tangle of alder and willow trees, and its savage shelter was the favourite haunt of wolves and foxes, outlaws, robbers, and rapparees.

Within this congenial cover Red Richard Corbett, with a troop of thirty horsemen, all well mounted, and armed and accoutred to the teeth, awaited Sir George Paulett's return from his matrimonial mission to Carn gall Castle.

It was midnight, and the silver moon was sailing high over the solemn wold, from out whose tangled depths the howl of the wolf and the sharp yelp of the prowling fox alone were heard, when Sir George Paulett, galloping at breakneck speed along the blind bridle-path leading through, or rather conducting into, the wooded fastness, reached the point at which the Red Esquire and his troop were stationed.

"What news?" inquired Corbett, as the Governor dashed up and abruptly checked his foaming steed.

"I have been refused!" answered Paulett, curtly.

"'Fore Beelzebub, I guessed as much!" exclaimed Red Richard, with a short laugh. "And now?"

"Now I shall take with the strong hand and the sharp sword,

Dickon—a game at which you and I can play better than at amorous passages in a fair lady's bower. Bring hither the led horse. This beast of mine is badly blown, you see."

"You have spurred hard, that he is so soon foespent," said Corbett. "'Twas well you thought of providing a fresh mount."

"I shall want a stout steed," answered Paulett, "for to-night this gallant grey must carry the fair MacLaughlin behind me into Derry; while yours, my trusty esquire, shall bear the lady Irene in like manner. Chichester grows impatient: the wench is well now, and the time is ripe."

"Hers was a long sickness," said Red Richard. "'Tis wonder the Deputy's fancy hath outlasted it."

"Outlasted! 'Increased' would be the truer term. You do not know what a persistent spirit Chichester is! This day I had a missive for him, by special courier, urging me to use despatch, and send the lady onward to Dundalk, where one is appointed to take charge of her. Chichester's order jumps with my own humour, and all goes merrily as a morris-dance. Was there ever an enterprise so winged by fortune? At one bold stroke I win a barony, a beauty, and a bag of treasure!"

"And me it brings a step nearer to my promised knighthood, and the Constableness of Derry, when your altered fortune draws you to a higher sphere," added Red Richard, appreciatively.

"The night wanes," said Paulett, "and despatch is now the word."

"Forward, my men, to Carn gall Castle!" he went on, raising his voice. "It is my purpose to take prisoner the old dotard lord and his two lady daughters, and once these are safely in my possession the greybeard traitor's castle is yours to sack and wreck from cope to ground-stone!"

Soon the silent cavalcade emerged from the savage fastness, and took the highroad leading northward to Carn gall. Broad on the right lay the silvery bosom of Lough Foyle. Before them, darkly outlined against sky and wave, the huge, square keep and grey turrets of MacLaughlin's ancient stronghold rose grimly from its jutting rock.

The command was now given to gallop. In silence the spurs were dug into the horses' flanks, and on dashed the troop at headlong speed.

They soon reached the castle gate, and Paulett commanded his men to halt. The grey old pile was dark and silent from base to battlement; everything without and within seemed wrapped in profoundest rest.

"Wind me a tan-ta-ra-rara on your trumpet, Dickon," cried Paulett. "We will disturb their dreaming!"

The Red Esquire raised a trumpet to his lips and blew a long and rousing blast, which was instantly responded to from within by the furious barking of a score of dogs, amid which the prolonged and deep-throated yell of Irene's boarhound was easily distinguishable.

Immediately, however, a warder appeared on the gate-tower head, and bending over the parapet, challenged sharply in Irish:

"Who goes there?"

"The Governor of Derry," answered Paulett, in loud tones. "I demand admittance in the name of the King!"

"The King—the Reagh Sassenach?" questioned the warder, in alarmed and hesitating accents.

"Do you dare question one who comes in the King's name," cried Paulett, fiercely. "Open the gate or it will be worse for you."

"Ward, there! eirigh—eirigh—ho!" called the sentinel, "Go tell the MacLaughlin, Sir George Paulett is at the gate with a troop of horse, and demands admittance in the King's name. Dhia! what will be the end of this?" muttered the warder to himself in much alarm.

Meanwhile Paulett's imperative message had been conveyed to Bryan MacLaughlin in his bedchamber by the aged seneschal of the castle.

"What! Paulett here?" ejaculated the chief, rubbing his eyes as he started from his slumbers—"seeks entrance—armed guard—name of King James? Open the gate at once; show him into the great hall with all respect; say I will attend him presently."

"Noble chief," said the old seneschal earnestly, "the Knight of Derry is on the safe side of the curtain-wall—for us! I would counsel you to keep him there until a better time. Dhia! I like not the aspect of this midnight garboil."

"Nor I, in sooth," answered MacLaughlin, "but as long as I hold myself King James' liege I must open my gates to admit his

messenger—go, go, delay will avail us nothing.”

“My lord and chief must be obeyed,” said the aged servitor, “yet I pray God and St. Columb you rue it not.”

A few minutes later Sir George Paulett, preceded by the seneschal bearing a lantern, strode into the hall where MacLaughlin stood waiting to receive him. The troopers filed into the apartment as their leader's back, with jingling spurs and clanking sabres, and formed in a circle around MacLaughlin, every fierce, whiskered face framed in its steel morion, wearing the fiercest and most malignant look.

MacLaughlin glanced around the sinister circle with his usual mildly dignified and undaunted front; then he brought his eye back to Paulett's lowering countenance.

“To what extraordinary circumstances, Sir George Paulett, am I to attribute your presence here at this unseasonable hour?” he demanded.

“Bryan MacLaughlin you are my prisoner in the name of the King!” answered Paulett, with a hoarse ring of triumphant malice in his voice.

At a sign the old chieftain was seized and bound, and given in charge to two stalwart troopers; while Paulett continued with a burst of exultation:—

“Aha, MacLaughlin, I told you I would return, and when I came you should aby my coming! I have come sooner than you thought for!”

“There cannot be any possible charge against me,” said MacLaughlin, “pray, sir, of what is it your pleasure to accuse me?”

“Treason.”

“Pshaw! it is as I suspected, then, a mere ebullition of insensate spleen on the part of a disappointed suitor for my daughter's hand.”

“Think not so, Sir Chieftain,” cried Paulett, airily, “no disappointed suitor am I! I have come to Carn gall to-night for my bride, and to-night the fair Una shall ride behind me into Derry.”

Bryan MacLaughlin grew white to the lips, and his eyes began to darken and blaze. Too late, the poor old chief began to see that Paulett and his marauders were now indeed on the wrong side of his curtain-wall!

"You will attempt no such dastardly outrage against my daughter's person," he said, in a voice tremulous with wrath and dread—"Sir Knight, you will not dare!"

"Dare!" echoed the Governor, with a fierce laugh, "we who wear steel caps and sharp swords may dare what we will, and do it too! Seneschal, lead me to your lady's chamber."

"May my legs wither when I do," answered the old man, wrathfully, as he turned and strode through the open doorway. He reached the head of the winding stairs leading downward to the great hall, and upward to higher regions, and raising his voice, he shouted in stentorian tones:—

"Rouse, there, warders! erigh—eirigh—ho! Blow the war-trumpet—ring the alarm bell—light the signal-fire on the tower-head!"

"Shut your cursed throat, by Mahound!" shouted Paulett, dashing after the seneschal. "Out, fellows! get through the castle, and spit every rug-headed kern that sends a whisper on the air!"

The marauders rushed out of the hall to obey their commander's order, leaving only a small guard in charge of their venerable prisoner; while Paulett seized the seneschal by the bosom of his tunic, and giving him a fierce shake, cocked the muzzle of a petronel between his eyes.

"Show me your lady's room, varlet!" he cried, hoarsely. "Come, lead on—move—tramp—skip! or in three parts of a second you'll be in limbo!"

For one instant the brave old man looked steadily into the muzzle of the pistol that held his death. Then flashing a stern glance of scorn at Paulett, while all the fire of his youth came back to his faded eye, he shouted in a voice of thunder:

"Rouse! rouse, Clan-Laughlin! To arms! to arms! Rescue your chief and your la"—

Before the last word was finished, the pistol flashed, the shot rang, and through the puff of white smoke that came between him and his murdered victim, Paulett flung the limp body from him, and impelled backward by the dual shock, the corpse of Mac-Laughlin's aged and faithful follower fell, doubled up, down the spiral stone stair, half choking the dark and narrow way.

At the same moment the first stroke of the alarm bell jangled shrilly through the still night air—the first stroke!—then came a

prolonged death-shriek, and the brazen tongue was still.

Paulett snatched the lantern from the pavement which the dying hand of the old seneschal had dropped, and, followed by Red Richard, dashed up the winding stair.

He knew that Una's chamber was somewhere on a higher level; but where, amid the multifarious nooks and crannies, angles, turrets, mural stairways and crooked corridors of the dark and vast old pile, he had no conception.

As he reached the first landing, however, he was spared all further trouble in his quest by the appearance of the fair object of his search, herself. Irene and Una threw open the chamber door and emerged on the corridor just as Paulett and the Red Esquire reached it.

When the eyes of the two terrified girls fell on the dark face and burning eyes of the Governor, and the bristling red beard and yellow orbs of his ferocious follower, they recoiled before them, and, retreating hurriedly into their chamber, made an united effort to close the door.

But, with a sinister laugh, Paulett thrust his sword between the door and its casement, and, placing his shoulder against it, pressed it back with rude strength and burst into the room.

Una fell back with a scream of terror; but in that moment of trial the natural strength of Irene's character reasserted itself, and, placing herself in front of her trembling foster-sister, she confronted the dark intruders with a fearless mien.

"In sooth, a sweet sanctuary for two shy goddesses!" said Paulett, with a laugh—"a soft elysium, as ever mortal man was privileged to enter!"

"You have no privilege to enter here, sir; retire at once," said Irene, with a calm and proud command that seemed to make no doubt of being obeyed.

"And so I will, ladybird, but when I do you shall accompany me, and you, fair trembler," he added, striding suddenly past the dark maiden, and seizing Una in his arms.

"I long wooed you as a slave, sweet minion," he continued, "to-night I woo you as a soldier, and by my fay, with better fortune!"

At that same moment Red Richard imprisoned Irene in his resistless grasp.

"Unhand me, villain! father—where is my father?" shrieked

Una, struggling with all her strength to free herself from the Governor's hold.

But all in vain. Paulett snatched a silken scarf from the table, and winding it about his fair captive, pinioned her arms securely behind her back.

Irene did not cry out; she had a conviction that it was useless to do so. She knew too well that if the warders and servants of the castle, to say nothing of the chief himself, had not been slain or overpowered, such an outrage could never have been perpetrated, and Paulett and his vile attendant could never have reached their chamber door alive.

By a powerful effort of her will the young girl suppressed all outward sign of the sickening dread and terror that filled her soul, and, turning to her captor with a calmness that surprised herself and partially threw him off his guard, she demanded:

"What do you mean to do? Where is the necessity for binding weak girls like us?"

"Why, none, if you are wise. You have merely got to ride with us to Derry."

"And then?"

"You, madam, shall travel farther, but fare none the worse for it."

"And Una?"

"The worthy Governor is bound to marry her out of hand, and you shall be bridesmaid," answered Corbett, sneeringly; "while your father is obligingly coming with us to give the bride away."

"Let us bind up our hair and put on some outer wraps," said Irene, still speaking calmly. "If we must perforce travel with you, you will, at least, permit us to travel in suitable attire."

"That is but reasonable," answered Corbett, releasing his fair captive. "Get on your fur-below—I give you two minutes."

Irene advanced hastily to the toilet-table, before which stood Paulett, coolly collecting and stowing away the jewels and valuables scattered thereon.

As he stood there a cloud of smoke swept up the stairway and entered the open doorway,

"Mahound!" ejaculated Paulett, as the air began to thicken with smoke, and fill with the strong smell of fire, "those momes and jolter-heads have fired the castle too soon, and half the valuables

will be consumed !”

“Have no fear,” said Corbett, “our lads are brisk enow to look to that; I’ll warrant their slop-pouches and haversacks are not empty.”

“Gag and bind your prisoner, and follow me quick !” cried the Governor, snatching a heavy velvet cloak from a chair and wrapping it closely around Una’s fair head, stifling her breath and her screams together. Then he raised her in his arms without more ado, and bore her from the room.

Irene was soon pinioned and muffled in a similar manner, and the Red Esquire dragged her from the apartment, with scant ceremony, and on after his leader down the winding stairs into the great hall. Irene found the stone steps moist and slippery under her feet; and in more than one place where the narrow stairway was blocked up, the young girl felt, with a shudder of unspeakable horror, that she was treading on the warm and weltering bodies of her slaughtered friends.

Presently she was ushered into the great hall, the furniture and hangings of which had been dragged into a heap into the middle of the floor, and set on fire.

The old chieftain of Carn gall still stood, bound and helpless between his guards, near the door of the apartment, a silent and sorrowful witness of the revel of ruin going on around him.

“Why, this is as it should be !” cried Paulett, as he glanced vengefully around the wrecked and desolated and blazing hall, the atmosphere of which had now become almost unendurable. “Bryan MacLaughlin,” he added, “your castle will soon be in red ruins from cope to groundstone.”

The prisoners were hurried out of the stifling atmosphere of the great hall and conducted to the courtyard.

MacLaughlin was mounted on his own horse, his arms bound behind him, and attached by a strong cord to the wrist of the trooper who held his bride. Una and Irene were placed, respectively behind Paulett and Red Richard, with a scarf passed around the waist of each which fastened her to the person of her captor.

The trumpet sounded to horse, and the marauders, red with murder and laden with plunder, hurried from all quarters of the burning castle and were soon in their saddles. Some half a dozen of these, however, were still empty, and Paulett looked around

impatiently.

"Where are Black Tom—Hubert—Ralph?" he said. "Can these stout varlets have come to grief within?"

"Here they are," answered Red Richard, as the three troopers named by the Governor issued from a postern door, dragging along a bound and wounded prisoner—a tall, dark man, whose torn tunic disclosed a scarf underneath, garnished with half a dozen pistolettes and a Spanish stiletto whose handle flashed with gems.

"Phew!" uttered Paulett, blowing a long whistle through his lips as he surveyed the prisoner by the strong glare of the burning castle, "whom have we here?"

"A traitor whom we found locked into an old turret room on the seventh storey, at the eastern angle of the donjon tower—a Spaniard, by his speech and rig—a man whose capture is worth a thousand merks, therefore we took him alive," answered one of the troopers, "though it was a tough task, look you, for he fought like a baited bear."

"So, so," exclaimed Paulett, triumphantly. "Bryan MacLaughlin, His Majesty's most faithful liege, is in league with Spanish conspirators—hellicate emissaries of the fugitive nobles? 'Slife! this puts a new face on an old affair!"

The Spaniard drew his tall form erect and confronted Paulett with a stern and haughty brow.

"I am not in league with the owner of this ill-fated castle, *Senor Capitano*," he said, in tolerable English, "or with any other in this neighbourhood, or nation. I am, indeed, an *Espanel*—a subject of King Philip, and whoever you may be, *senor*, you shall answer for this violence."

"I am the Governor of Derry, be it known to you," answered Paulett, with a swaggering air. "Why were you concealed in this castle, Sir Spaniard, answer me that?"

"I was not concealed, *Senor el Gobernador*," returned the Spaniard, haughtily. "I asked shelter at this castle gate not an hour before your arrival there, and received it without question from the aged *seneschal*, whom, alas! I do not see here! *Senor* the Chieftain was not aware of my presence under his hospitable roof."

"What is your name, Sir Spaniard?"

"Don Eugenio del Castillo."

"Good ! A gentleman of consequence ?"

"Si, senor," returned the Spaniard, proudly, "and your name is ?"

"Sir George Paulett, Governor of Derry," answered that individual, with an air of braggadocia. "And now, knaves," he added, turning to the troopers who held the Spaniard, "mount your prisoner on the dead soldier's horse and keep him fast; I doubt not his neck is worth the thousand merks."

The trumpet again sounded to horse, a loud and strenuous summons; and when the troop was finally assembled it was found that two of the marauders were missing, and several others wounded.

Paulett had selected his men from the hardiest and most powerful of his command, and the wounded were all able to ride. Those who failed to answer to the trumpet-call, it was concluded, had been slain in the melee, and their bodies were left to be consumed by the flames with the corpses of MacLaughlin's murdered servants and retainers.

Chapter 13.

ALL IN A BRIGHT SPRING MORNING.

It was still early in the forenoon of the day following the events narrated in our last chapter, when Sir Cahir O'Doherty, bent on paying a farewell visit to Irene Magennis before her departure for the spanish convent, mounted on his black horse and followed by his stout henchman, cantered lightly along the road leading northward to Carn gall castle.

Out on its wave-washed rock stood the hoary old castle of MacLaughlin, a lurid haze brooding over its blackened and roofless towers, a cloud of dun smoke lying all around it, filling up the deep dells and bosky hollows, and creeping far out over the shining sea.

There was still a dull-red glare in every window, and through gaping rents and fissures in the walls the smouldering fires within still showed like a dying furnace.

O'Doherty as he looked could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes, and was fain to fancy himself under the influence of some fairy spell, or what, had he lived in our day, he would have termed an optical illusion.

He turned from the startling spectacle of the burning castle, and glanced around at the familiar features of the scene. There were the mighty hills, there the sun-bright lough; miles ahead rose the lofty keep of Redcastle; beyond it peeped forth the grey abbey-towers of Coole. If his eyes deceived him in one point, they were faithful enough in their record of every other. With a sinking heart he turned them once more on MacLaughlin's castled rock.

He soon reached the castle, and followed a little later by his

henchman, rode round and round the smoking pile, which sent forth on the morning air a heavy, sickening, steamy smell, but from which issued no sound save the low seething and hissing of the dying fires.

Cawbar O'Doherty his henchman, however, accompanied his circuit of the desolated pile with many a bodeful conjecture as to the cause of the destruction that had come upon it, all which were somewhat wide of the mark.

"Blessed Lady!" he exclaimed, "bethink you, noble chief, can MacLaughlin have lost, in any way, the sword and the collar of gold? You know it was foretold that the chiefs of Clan-Laughlin should rule in their own land so long only as these were preserved to them."

O'Doherty shook his head.

"I am certain," he said, "MacLaughlin has not lost these venerable heirlooms, unless, indeed, with them he has lost his life.

"That is truth" rejoined the henchman, "yet what can have brought this blight on the house of MacLaughlin?" he continued, dolefully.

"Peace, Cawbar!" cried O'Doherty, with impatience and excitement in his voice.

"Vich na hoigh!" ejaculated the henchman, as he surveyed with startled eyes the palpable evidence of the recent raid. "I fear something;" he added, as his quick ear caught the sound of a low moan from a thicket of old bourtrees near the castle gate.

Lying amongst the long grass under cover of the rugged, old bourtrees, they found Irene's boy-page, the same who had carried her message to Sir Cahir on the previous day.

The poor boy's tunic was soaked with blood, and all the grass around him was reddened with the vital tide. His eyes were closed; his jaw relaxed; his face like the face of a corpse. Only the faint moans that issued from his pallid lips gave token that he was still alive.

"Your flask, Cawbar," cried O'Doherty, as he bent over the boy and slit open his tunic with his skene, to discover where he was wounded.

Cawbar produced a flask from his pouch and poured some wine between the boy's colourless lips; while O'Doherty soon discovered that his body was covered with cuts and gashes, and that there

was a deep wound over the region of the heart.

Cawbar again poured a little wine down the page's throat, after which he opened his eyes and gazed feebly around.

"Are you able to tell me what hurt you so, my poor fellow?" enquired Sir Cahir, anxiously.

"The sassum deargs," answered the boy, in a faint whisper; and he again closed his eyes, with a shudder.

"Tell me, if you can," pursued O'Doherty, "what or who set fire to the castle?"

"The sassum deargs," again breathed the boy, more faintly than before.

Sir Cahir's brow grew dark and his blue eyes flashed ominously.

"Where is MacLaughlin and the ladies?" continued he, with painful disquiet in his tones.

"Paulett—Derry—prisoners," whispered the boy.

"And his servants and retainers—where are they?"

"Dead—murdered—burnt," returned the page, with another deep shudder that seemed almost to shake the last trembling life-sands from the nearly empty glass, "I too, was cut down—trampled over—but I crept out when"——

Here the boy's eyes closed; his voice died out, and he sank into a death-like swoon.

"We have learned enough," said O'Doherty, briefly and sternly, "or, at least, as much as this poor boy can tell. Let us carry him to some place of shelter, and then!"——

The young chieftain did not tarry to obtain further information, if, indeed, any further was to be had. It was enough to know that Paulett and his myrmidons had fired the castle of his venerable friend and murdered his servants. That Una and Irene, not to mention the poor, old chief, were in the hands of the ruffian Governor. And to what indignities might not these gentle ladies have been already subjected, especially the beautiful daughter of MacLaughlin, Paulett's non-requested passion for whom was well-known to O'Doherty?

Sir Cahir re-mounted his horse, and, followed by his trusty henchman, set off on the spur towards Derry.

"Dhia! the end of these things is near!" muttered the chieftain as he rode along. "I feel it—the end is near!"

Chapter 14.

BEIM CO FAUMUS.

When O'Doherty arrived at Derry he found the city gates open, and, entering by the lower fort, ride straight to the Governor's house.

Dismounting there, he gave his horse in charge to a lackey, and, desiring his henchman to follow him, was ushered by a porter into the outer vestibule. Here he found a guard of some twenty halberdiers drawn across the upper end of the hall.

"Where is the Governor?" inquired Sir Cahir, addressing the sergeant of the guard.

"Within," returned the man sullenly.

"Tell him the O'Doherty would see him instantly."

A halberdier was despatched with Sir Cahir's message, and in a short time Paulett appeared, entering by the upper end of the hall, and passing through his guards, who opened their ranks to make way for him.

The dark Governor looked unusually debonair and self-complaisant, and was tricked out with uncommon magnificence.

"A good day, O'Doherty," he said airily. "Do you come to deliver up that contumacious traitor and mar-peace, your foster-father, Phelim Reagli?"

"Sir?" exclaimed the chieftain, more than amazed at Paulett's brazen audacity.

"By the Mass, yes!" continued Paulett, in the same strain. "A special courier arrived here yestermorn, bearing a letter from my

Lord Deputy—here it is”—drawing a packet stamped with Chichester’s seal from the perfumed bosom of his doublet—“acquainting me with the fact that you are pledged to yield up your vile foster-father into my hands to be duly tried and punished for his many misdemeanours.”

“I gave no such pledge,” said O’Doherty, looking all the indignant scorn and wrath he felt, “and he who says so lies in his caitiff throat !”

“But Gormanstown, who was foolish enough to become warranty for such brittle ware, gave the promise in your name.”

“Assuredly then, without my knowledge or consent; I will hold myself bound by no such base compact, and he who would enforce it must do so, by heaven, with a sharper weapon than a parchment scroll ! But enough of that ! My errand here is of a different colour. You have done a deed last night that might outshame hell—a deed for which I am here to call you to account—a deed for which you must answer to me with your cowardly body, foot to foot and point to point !”

“Hear ye this, my masters ?” exclaimed Paulett, with a forced laugh. “The Irish swinge-buckler is in a devil’s hurry to have his pate cloven ! But you speak in riddles,” he added. “What deed of mine is that sticks so in your costard ?”

“Would you deny it,” cried O’Doherty, wrathfully. “Would you deny that last night you entered MacLaughlin’s Castle by some fiendish trick, burned and plundered it, murdered his servants, and carried off the old chieftain and his daughters to your accursed city ?”

“I do not deny it,” answered Paulett, coolly, “and in doing so I performed a service to the State worthy of the highest commendation. The castle was a rare nest of rebels—a hotbed of treason and sedition.”

“This is the very madness of falsehood,” said Sir Cahir, scornfully. “Where are your proofs of this alleged treason ?”

“For your especial pleasure, Sir Knight, I shall produce one of them,” answered Paulett, with mock courtesy. “Sergeant, bring hither the Spanish emissary I”

The sergeant saluted and withdrew to obey the order; and Paulett setting one arm akimbo, and rakishly tilting his bonnet on one side, proceeded to fill the lowering silence that ensued by

chanting a stave of a guardroom ballad then in vogue :—

“Ho ! souldates, ho ! for a blazing city,
Where the men are rich and the maids are pretty;
The maids we'll kiss and the men we'll raddle,
Then tan-ta-ra-rara, boot and saddle !
Tan-ta-ra-rara, tan-ta-ra-rara,
Tan-ta-ra-rara, boot and saddle !”

Sir Cahir stood silently chafing, his fingers nervously opening and closing on the hilt of his sword; for as the atrocious Governor, fresh from his last deed of outrage and massacre, trolled the verse over and over again, affecting to exaggeration the swagger of a gay and ruffling cavalier, every jeering tone and syllable was made to convey a covert insult.

Presently, however, the halberdiers again opened to right and left, and through their ranks the Spanish prisoner, his tall form laden with heavy chains, was led forward between the sergeant and a jailer.

“Your name is Don Eugenio Del Castillo ?” began Paulett, addressing the prisoner.

“I have before told you so,” returned the Spaniard, with cold hauteur.

“You were taken prisoner in Carn gall Castle ?”

“Such, I am given to understand, was the name of the place.”

“You had no passports ?”

“None.”

“You are a Spaniard ?”

“Si Senor, I am an Espanol.”

“You hear ?” cried Paulett, turning triumphantly to O'Doherty.

“I hear,” returned O'Doherty, scornfully, “that you have taken prisoner a Spanish gentleman whom, probably, you had as little cause for arresting as you had for murdering the household of MacLaughlin, and laying violent hands on the venerable chieftain and the ladies of his family.”

“I thank you for those words, senor,” said the Spaniard, with a grave and courteous bow, “and I can assure you that my being in Ireland was solely owing to an accident of wind and water. I”—

“Remove the prisoner !” interrupted Paulett, sternly; and the Spaniard was instantly hurried away.

“With this stranger's presence here or elsewhere I make no con-

cern," said O'Doherty. "I demand the instant release of the two ladies you have brought hither; there cannot be any shadow of a shade of excuse for detaining them—here!"

"But the ladies are here of their own fair, good will," returned Paulett, with unblushing effrontery, "and one of them, at least, hath taken such a sweet fancy to my proper person, that neither will I give up my lovely leman at thy churlish bidding, nor will she consent to abandon her faithful cavalier."

"False knave!" cried O'Doherty, "lead me to the ladies; I shall believe that they are contented under the roof of the murderer of their people and the ruthless destroyer of their home only when I hear it from their own lips. Come, to the proof!—to the proof, sir!—lead me thither!"

"And who are you to dictate to the Governor of Derry in his own city and in his own house?" hissed Paulett, suddenly throwing aside his assumed jocularity, and scowling at O'Doherty with demoniac hate and fury.

As Paulett hurled forth the words, he sprang forward with the bound of a panther, and implanted a heavy blow of his clenched fist full in O'Doherty's face.

The blow was as unexpected as it was audacious, and launched with all the strength of Paulett's ruffian arm, it was sufficient to have stunned an ordinary man.

But O'Doherty only staggered back until he was caught in the arms of his henchman, who sprang to his assistance with a guttural roar of imprecation, his skene-fada flashing out in his strong right-hand, his face black with passion.

In a moment Sir Cahir recovered himself; a choking cry of rage escaped his lips; his sword was out like lightning, and like lightning he leaped towards his assailant.

But Sir Cahir was only in time to see Paulett, who had no notion of meeting the impetuous onset, disappearing through the door by which he had entered, at the rear of his guards, whose ranks, as they closed shoulder to shoulder, presented a triple line of ten-foot halberds to Sir Cahir's breast; while Paulett's clanking tread could be heard ringing on the stone-flagged passage within, and his voice came back to Sir Cahir's ear in derisive and triumphant tones as he sang:

"The maids we'll kiss and the men we'll raddle,
Then tan-ta-ra-rara, boot and saddle!"

Mad with rage, O'Doherty would have charged the triple line of bristling steel that opposed his passage, with the intention of cutting his way through and pursuing the dastard Governor to the death or losing his own life in the attempt. But Cawbar threw himself on his knees before him, clasping his legs with his strong arms, besought him not to rush on certain destruction, a thing which Paulett undoubtedly calculated upon and desired.

"You are right, Cawbar," said O'Doherty, lowering his sword, "Paulett!" he added, raising his clear resonant voice to its highest pitch, until it rang through the whole building like a trumpet-call—"runaway dog and dastard, dishonoured even, before your own cut-throat crew, think not to escape my vengeance, it shall find you speedily, and that blow you shall pay for with the last drop that warms your coward heart."

O'Doherty stood still for a few moments after uttering this threat, in hopes that Paulett might be tempted to return. Paulett did not appear, but through the grim silence that prevailed, a prolonged and thrilling cry—a woman's cry, sharp and wild with terror, agony, distress, came from some distant portion of the house, yet with fearful distinctness to Sir Cahir's ear.

"What cry is that?" he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with painful agitation.

An insolent and sneering laugh from Paulett's halberdiers was the only response elicited.

"Villains!" cried the chieftain with passionate and terrible vehemence, "tell your skulking master that if any wrong or insult be offered within this house to either of the two noble ladies foully held here in durance—tell him—as God hears me!—the vengeance of O'Doherty shall be a thing to remember ages after your carrion corpses have ceased to feed the worms!"

With these parting words, Sir Cahir turned and strode out of the hall.

"The die is cast!" cried O'Doherty, as having passed the gates of Derry, he took his way once more towards Buncrana.

When they reached a certain crossroads, Cawbar was surprised to see that O'Doherty did not pursue his way straight on to Buncrana, but took the eastward turn leading to the ancient Abbey of

Fahan. Soon the towers and gables of the grand old monastic pile, battered even then, by war and time and tempest, arose before them from amid their embowering woods.

Sir Cahir dismounted at the church-gates, and fastening his bridle to the branch of a tree, motioned to his henchman to follow him. He passed with stately tread up the nave of the ancient church, carrying under his arm his Spanish hat with its trailing heron's plume. The church was empty, save for one bowed and solitary figure, kneeling in a dim and distant corner before a shrine and statue of St. Francis. But Sir Cahir looked neither to right nor left. With his gold spurs and steel scabbard clanking on the pavement of the silent church, he passed on until, under the carved and gilded screen of the sanctuary, he stopped before the high altar with his feet on the marble slab that covered the ashes of his gallant father, and of his illustrious ancestors since the days of Connor the Generous.

Here Sir Cahir knelt, and raising his eyes heavenward, and lifting his clasped hands, he said, in a voice that thrilled with awful solemnity through the dim and silent church:

"God of my fathers—Mary, Mother of God—glorious Columbkille, saint of the blood of Con ! hear, and record my vow ! and do ye bury my name in eternal infamy, and my soul in eternal torment, if I blench or break the oath I make before this holy altar where thou, God, art present ! I swear to touch no wine-cup, to taste no pleasure, that the spur shall not leave my heel, nor the sword my girdle, that the skies shall cover me as a roof at night, and the bare earth be my bed of slumber, until I have slain my insulter Paulett, and left not one of his viper blood in Derry, nor man nor house of them or theirs, so help me God and my good sword, and keep me, Almighty Power, as I keep my vow !"

As O'Doherty breathed the last word of this terrible vow, the friar, who had been aroused from his devotions by the entrance of the chief and his follower, and who, leaning against a column of the aisle at a little distance, had been an unnoticed and silent spectator of this strange and impressive episode, advanced quickly and raising his hands, benediction-wise, over the head of the kneeling chief, blessed him with solemn fervour.

The friar was Father Edmond, the young Franciscan for whose spiritual reformation the King's Bishop of Derry had been so vainly

solicitous, and against whom the thunders of proscription and outlawry had since been hurled with seven-fold vengeance.

O'Doherty bent his knee towards the high altar, and turning, walked out of the church. A few moments afterwards he was in the saddle, and galloping along the high-road to Buncrana, followed by his henchman, at his best rate of speed.

"I knew it!" muttered Cawbar, as he rode along. "I felt that the wind of fate was in the air!"

Chapter 15.

MURIEL CORBETT MEETS HER RIVAL—PAULETT VISITS HIS FAIR CAPTIVE.

Sir George Paulett reached his own house in the small hours of the morning, after his raid on Carn gall Castle.

Una and Irene were at once conducted to separate apartments, and locked up therein; while MacLaughlin and the Spaniard were conveyed in chains to the vaults below.

Irene found the room in which she was confined handsomely furnished and commodious.

At a tall, narrow, lancet-window, which looked out on Paulett's spacious garden, and which, piercing the immense thickness of the wall, and curtained with gold-hued damask, made a deep, splayed niche within the room, Irene was seated, with her mind full of distressful and foreboding thoughts, when the door of her chamber suddenly opened, and Muriel Corbett entered.

Irene rose from her chair, and a glow of surprise and pleasure overspread her face as her eye fell on this unexpected vision of female grace and loveliness—in such a place !

Muriel advanced swiftly to within a few steps of where Irene stood, and there stopped abruptly, scanning the tall figure from head to foot.

"You are MacLaughlin's daughter?" questioned Muriel, after a minute's silent scrutiny. "You are Shiel O'Brasil's love?"

"Did you know Shiel O'Brasil?" asked Irene, in much surprise.

"I have seen him, and heard that he loved a daughter of Mac-Loughlin."

"My sister—Una. I never had a lover, and desire none."

"Nonsense!" cried Muriel, with a short, incredulous laugh. "Yours is the sort of face that men rave about. But mayhap, like me, you gave your heart where you have found no return, and in that sense you never had a lover."

Irene blushed scarlet under the keen eyes of Muriel Corbett, and turned haughtily away.

"I see I am right," rejoined the red maiden, laughing again. "Well, comfort you! if you cannot have your heart's love, you shall have wealth and power, which are next best. I'll warrant me my Lord Deputy will surround you with state and splendour as a very queen."

Irene made a haughty and indignant gesture.

"I shall never go to the Lord Deputy," she cried. "I will die first! Do you not understand that his so-called love for me is a grievous insult?—and, oh! you will help me to escape from here!"

"I cannot help you," answered Muriel, coldly; "your fate is not in my hands. I have no interest and no concern in it—you may float with the stream of destiny, even as I have floated."

The girl turned and walked across the room with her peculiar, proud, swinging step. The door opened and closed again, the key grated in the lock, and Irene was once more alone in her prison-room.

Meanwhile, in an exactly similar apartment, at the opposite end of the long corridor on which Irene's room opened, Una Mac-Loughlin was pacing fitfully to and fro, with her fair fingers interlaced before her; her rich hair, disarranged by the night-ride, tumbled wildly about her beautiful shoulders, and her violet eyes dark with terror for her father, for Irene, and above all, for her own imminent and impending fate.

Presently the door opened and closed again, softly.

Una started round, her violet eyes dilating with terror, expecting to encounter the hated face of Paulett; but a glad cry of astonishment and joy escaped her as her glance fell, instead, on Muriel Corbett.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, going towards her, quickly, with outstretched and appealing arms, "I did not think there was a woman in this dreadful house!"

"You never heard of Muriel Corbett, then?" said the red maiden, pausing at some distance from Una, and repelling with a cold gesture her joyful advances.

Una shook her golden head sadly.

"Alas, no," she answered, "but, oh, you will help me—you look kind and good—you will aid me to escape from Paulett?"

"You are Una MacLaughlin?" said Muriel, keenly scanning the fair face and form before her as she had previously scanned Irene's.

"Yes, I am the most unhappy girl."

"The girl whom Captain Shiel O'Brasil loved so dearly?"

"Alas, yes!—and Una's lovely violet eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears. "Ah, poor Shiel, if he were living he would rescue and save me now!"

"You think so?" said Muriel, her golden-hazel eyes beginning to gleam and fill with the deep, orange light that always gathered into them in moments of excitement.

"I know it," answered Una.

"You love him still?" pursued Muriel.

"I will love him always," returned Una, in her desolation and distraction of mind, feeling none of that natural resentment which, under ordinary circumstances, she would have experienced at this persistent inquisition by an entire stranger. "I will love him ever and always; but he is dead—dead over a year ago."

"Yes, he is dead!" cried Muriel, brusquely, "and you ought to cease thinking of him. Let the dead rest in their graves!"

"But listen, Muriel, I am rich, and if you will help me to escape them, I will share my golden dower with you, piece for piece, to the last coin. Muriel, will you help me?"

"I cannot," answered the red maiden, fiercely, "and I would not if I could!"

And wrenching her silken skirt from poor Una's clinging hands, the red-haired maiden walked out of the room as Sir George Paulett entered.

The Governor stepped jauntily up to his fair captive, still singing trippingly the stanza with which he had left O'Doherty in the hall below.

Una recoiled before him in unconquerable terror and loathing; and as the door closed on Muriel Corbett's retreating form, there rang from the poor girl's lips the prolonged, distressful cry which had so startled and alarmed Sir Cahir in the outer vestibule.

"Softly, softly, ladybird!" said Paulett, breaking off in his song, with an amused and malicious laugh at Una's terror. "I only came to tell you that we are to be married sometime before midnight; until then you are your own mistress—afterwards, sweetest, you shall be mine, and I your humblest slave. Forgive me if I give you little of my company until that hour; for until then I am like to have enough of business on hands, arranging with your father, who is, unhappily for himself, a somewhat stiff-necked, unaccommodating old gentleman, the matter of dowry and marriage settlements."

"My father will never consent to this," said Una, tremulously.

"Yes, he will—oh, yes!—we have excellent ways of persuasion here,"

"You will not hurt—or—or terrify my father, surely?—oh, say you will not," faltered Una, in imploring tones.

Paulett looked at the fair girl, as she stood before him with clasped hands and pleading eyes—how it pleased him to see her thus!

"You will not hurt or terrify my father?" pleaded Una, once more.

"I will not hurt or terrify either you or him, though I must impose my will on both—but for you, sweet Una, that will is love!"

Paulett advanced towards his fair prisoner as he spoke, and again Una recoiled before him, screaming wildly in renewed and increasing terror.

Paulett laughed sardonically. The hatred and loathing with which Una regarded him, while it irritated and enraged him, served only to inflame his passion.

The young girl placed herself behind a chair, the only piece of furniture in the room which she could interpose between herself and the pursuit of her persecutor. The lancet window was a mere slit, far too narrow to admit the passage of a human form; there was no hope of escape in that direction.

Still laughing at his fair captive's fears, Paulett strode forward and pushing away the frail barrier behind which she had sought

refuge, caught her in his arms.

"Now ladybird, you are fairly caught and caged!" he cried, pressing her triumphantly in his rude embrace.

Una's terror was too wild for words. She could only scream; and again her agonised cry thrilled through every corner of the building.

The next moment the door opened without ceremony, and Red Richard Corbett's fierce, yellow eyes and repulsive visage appeared glaring into the room.

"The fixtures in the question room are all ready," he said, addressing Paulett, "mayhap the business had better now begin?"

"What brings you here?" cried Paulett, angrily. "See to it yourself—I will be with you presently!"

"Take him away, for mercy's sake!" cried Una, struggling to free herself from Paulett's arms—"take him away, Master Corbett, and I will owe you eternal gratitude!"

A curious gleam shot from Red Richard's yellow eyes as the soft voice addressed him.

"Come!" he said, doggedly to Paulett, "it is mine to work while you philander, and mine to stand aside when the prizes come to be distributed. I have neither wife nor sweetheart in this city or garrison, and some there are, by thunder, who would have both, twice told! the fixtures are ready—I say come!"

Red Richard turned from the door with a lowering look of sullen dissatisfaction. Paulett glanced at his savage Esquire and then at Una, and back again towards the former, with an air of angry indecision. Then releasing his trembling prisoner with a half smothered imprecation, he followed Corbett from the room, closing and locking the door behind him.

Chapter 16.

IN THE DUNGEON-VAULT—LOVE OR GRATITUDE —O'BRASIL'S FLIGHT.

The lowest dungeon-vault of Sir George Paulett's house was a dark and narrow subterranean den, whose walls were green and slimy with moisture, and whose oozy, earthen floor was plasny with underground water. It was furnished with a pile of evil-smelling, rotton straw in one wet corner, and above this, a ringbolt driven into the wall, from which hung a heavy chain and manacle.

In this vault, with the iron manacle claspings his left wrist, Shiel O'Brasil was wearily pacing to and fro, the length of his rusty chain—alone, in dense darkness, amid foul and fœtid odours, in silence that was almost palpable.

To this dungeon O'Brasil had been consigned by Paulett's order, on the day, now over a year ago, when Muriel Corbett, no longer able to furnish an excuse for detaining him in the comparative comfort of his first prison-room, had been obliged reluctantly to acknowledge her patient out of danger of death.

Here the young soldier was wearily dragging his chain in silence, in darkness, in utter ignorance of all that was taking place in the outer world—the world to which he had once belonged, but of which he was beginning to feel himself no longer a part.

For hours O'Brasil had been striding thus, back and forth, measuring the confines of his narrow cell with quick and impatient, yet tired and heavy tread, and strange rings of blue and white fire were beginning to dance amid the thick darkness, before his pain-

ed and sightless eyeballs, when a step sounded on the flagged passage without—a well-known and detested step—and Paulett's hoarse voice was heard lustily trolling the refrain of that ballad to which he seemed lately to have taken such an amazing fancy:—

“The maids we'll kiss and the men we'll raddle,
Then tan-ta-ra-rara, boot and saddle”——

Presently the iron door of O'Brasil's dungeon jarred open on its rusty hinges, and the Governor, holding a lantern above his head, strode into the cell, with Red Richard Corbett at his heels.

The Governor stood gazing at his prisoner with snaky and malignant eyes—eyes in which wonder was blended with hate and rage, for under all the sufferings imposed upon him, O'Brasil had not broken down, either mentally or physically.

In fact, despite all that he had suffered, despite torture, wounds, and chains, damps, foul air, taunts and terrors manifold—Shiel O'Brasil was still bold, erect, strong and handsome as ever!

“Soh!” sneered Paulett, after viewing him for some time in sinister silence, “you take to your bread and water, your wisp and chain as naturally as a duck to a pool!”

“Oddspoints! and thrives on it, too, better than some you wot on wine and capon,” added Red Richard, with a grin.

“'Tis well he should look spruce,” rejoined Paulett, grimly. “He will soon be invited to a wedding, Dickon.”

“Mark how his eyes flash,” continued Red Richard in the same gibing tone.

“Brimstone!” said Paulett, “brimstone! When he was first found floating the sea-water burned blue beneath him, and smoked and bubbled like a witch's cauldron.”

“Feel of his knees,” cried Corbett, pursuing his jest, and producing from his pouch a flint and a piece of match. “I'll lay my beard against a quart of sack I'll strike a spark from them that will fire this fuse!”

The Red Esquire advanced as he spoke, spreading his ugly mouth in a complacent grin, and, stooping, made a smart stroke with the flint at O'Brasil's knee.

But O'Brasil drew back his limb with a sudden jerk, and launched a kick in the ribs of the clumsy jester that doubled him up like a cloak, driving him violently against the farther wall of the dungeon.

"Did that spark strike home, Master Corbett?" said the young man, with a scornful smile.

Red Richard picked himself up, and drew a pistol from his girdle with a howl of rage.

"Nay, never spoil my nuptials by shooting my groomsman!" cried Paulett, grasping his esquire's arm as he raised it to cock the pistol. "'Twas not for a death like this our blade o' game has been reserved so long. He will die of a wedding, man—you forget he is to die of a wedding! Go see to the iron orders with which he is soon to be invested, and never let your mad temper, Dickon, make such a mar-sport."

"So you would have your chain loosed?" said Paulett, eyeing his prisoner with a look of sinister and bitter exultation. "Well, you shall be gratified."

"When?"

"In a few brief hours, when I shall come to bid you to my marriage. Until then—adieu!"

As Paulett spoke the last word he stepped out of the cell. The iron door clanged to with a jar and shock that echoed through all the narrow, crooked passages and underground dungeon-dens, where the dark Governor hid his captives and his crimes.

The door had not long closed on the chained prisoner, leaving him to speculate, in the thick darkness, on the yet darker threats and innuendos of his jailer, when another and a welcomer sound fell on his wakeful ear.

It was the sound of an iron panel in his dungeon-wall sliding downward in well-oiled grooves—a sound that day after day, night after night, had brought comfort and alleviation to his dark abode.

At the same moment a stream of light fell across the gloom, and framed in the open aperture from which it came, appeared the fair form and face of Muriel Corbett.

She glided into the dungeon, tip-toeing daintily along the wet floor, with her silken train over her snowy arm; and, putting down her lamp, went up to O'Brasil with a tender smile.

"Forgive me, forgive me," she whispered, "that I have not come sooner; but the Governor was abroad to-day, and I knew he meant to visit you, so I had to wait until that was over."

"How much I have to thank you for, dear Muriel, and what manifold risks you have run for my sake," said O'Brasil fervently,

but in the same cautiously lowered tones.

"Risks !" echoed Muriel, "speak not of it ! there is yet another and a greater to be encountered. But come, you have been too long to-day in this poisonous den."

With these words Muriel unlocked the prisoner's chain, and followed by him, lightly led the way through the secret portal closing it carefully when they had passed through.

Before them rose a steep and narrow flight of stone steps, built within the thickness of the wall, a dark, dizzy, perilous-looking ascent, almost losing itself in the deep gloom above, and showing at intervals other iron panels, conducting into other prison chambers.

This inter-mural stairway formed the secret entrance to the most secret recesses of the dungeon vaults; but Paulett of late had become too much addicted to the wine-cup, and consequently too unsteady in his movements, to care to encounter its difficulties, consequently the light foot of Muriel Corbett, who kept the dark Governor's secrets and her own as well, was alone privileged to tread it.

The stairway led up to a small closet, communicating with the handsome suite of apartments dedicated to Muriel's use.

The wall of the closet was pierced by a narrow lancet-window, affording a glimpse of green fields and waving woods, and the deep-flowing Foyle beyond.

Its furniture consisted only of a huge pile of rich rugs and cushions, thrown carelessly together on the matted floor, as if to be out of the way; also two chairs and a small table on which a substantial and appetising repast was spread.

In this abode of comparative comfort, O'Brasil, thanks to Muriel's tireless kindness, or rather to that infinitely more powerful and puissant sentiment that had taken full possession of the girl's wayward heart, had spent most of his time during his long and weary imprisonment. Here he had been supplied with toilette necessities; here he had taken his meals, always of the best; and here, under softest rugs, on those luxuriant cushions flung with apparent carelessness in one corner to deceive any casual eye, he had slept as Paulett never meant him to sleep, on the wisp of rotten straw, in the foul and sunken cell to which he had consigned him.

Muriel had been but seldom with him during these hours of reprieve, as it was necessary for her to be constantly and most vigilantly on the watch, lest Paulett should chance to visit his prisoner's dungeon and discover his absence.

To-day, however, she seemed disposed to linger.

"Sit down, sit down, Captain O'Brasil," she said, seating herself on the opposite side of the table, "the door leading to my rooms is locked; Dickon is busy; the Governor is engaged just now with some new lady-love; so, for the present, we are safe enough."

"A lady-love!" exclaimed O'Brasil, uneasily, as he recalled Paulett's dark hints about the "wedding" to which he was to be invited, "for heaven's sake, dear Muriel, who is she?"

"I take no note of the Governor's love passages," returned the girl, coldly, "but I am assured it is no one in whom you or I need have any interest. I would speak with you of other things, and the time is short. Captain O'Brasil, the time is come when you can stay but little longer within these walls."

"My kind preserver?" cried the young man, fervently, "how often have I besought you to crown all your favours by aiding me to escape from them!"

"And me?" said Muriel, reproachfully.

"How can you say so?" returned O'Brasil, warmly, "the day shall never come when I shall cease to regard you with the liveliest gratitude."

"Gratitude again!" exclaimed Muriel, impatiently. "Oh, O'Brasil, but for this gratitude! this gratitude! Paulett's prison walls had not held you here so long!"

"Muriel?" ejaculated O'Brasil, in amazement.

"Because it was gratitude and that alone," continued the girl, almost fiercely, yet with a mournful and melting glance of those strangely beautiful eyes—a glance that told all too plain a tale, even without the daring words that followed—"Gratitude is but a poor weed at best," she went on, scornfully, "and I foolishly and vainly dreamt that yours might blossom, in time, into a flower of another hue."

O'Brasil's dark face flushed to the temples, then grew pale and flushed again; all the embarrassment which Muriel's bold avowal occasioned him, plainly visible in his fluctuating colour, and in the

perturbed expression of his countenance.

There was a long minute of distressing silence, during which he felt to the full all the difficulty and delicacy, as well as all the danger of his trying situation. Then his strong and candid manhood came to his aid, and he answered, gravely and gently:

"Muriel, there are some hearts that, having once given birth and bloom to such a flower, never again can produce another. Had not mine been so occupied long before your fair face lightened the gloom of my dungeon—long ere your gentle heart prompted you to pluck me from death, the life you gave me had of right belonged to you, and you alone."

"But as it is?" said Muriel, in low, tense tones.

"As it is," answered the young man, with simple, straightforward directness, "life and love, heart and hand, are irrevocably, though hopelessly, pledged to another."

"And if she—if that other—should have proved false and fickle—forgotten you after your supposed death—married, say?"

O'Brasil winced visibly, as he rose hastily from his chair.

"Then my faith in woman should be dead," he answered shortly.

"And you would not care to have the fabric rebuilt?" she said.

"Impossible!" returned the young man, darkly; "there should then be no foundation left on which to erect it."

"You refuse me?" said Muriel, raising her eyes to his with a mournful and impassioned glance. "I would have lived for you, O'Brasil, but since you refuse me, I will show you that I have still courage left—to die!"

As the girl spoke she took from some secret receptacle of her silken gown a small pistolette, a tiny but deadly toy, daintily inlaid, and glittering with costly gems, and carried its muzzle quickly to her temple.

"I have sacrificed so much," she said, in low, intense tones—"love—pride—womanly dignity—this last is but a little thing, and when"——

"Good God!" cried O'Brasil, seizing the hand that held the pistol and drawing it down forcibly, while he noticed that its hideous muzzle had made a red ring on the blue-veined and transparent skin, "Muriel, dear girl, what would you do?"

To soothe her stormy spirit, he put his arms gently around her,

and, bending, kissed the waves of lustrous hair that were so near his lips.

"You do not refuse me, then?" she murmured, letting her beautiful head droop for a moment on his shoulder. "I may live for you, if there be no one else?"

"As you will, dear Muriel," he answered, with a perplexed smile, "but"——

"Nay, you have given me a moment's happiness, do not be so cruel as to recall it. But, hark" she added, raising herself suddenly from O'Brasil's arms with startled look in her golden-hazel eyes—"Listen, O'Brasil, what is that we hear?"

"I hear the click of a hammer—a sharp, metallic ring," answered O'Brasil.

"Right!" said Muriel, with a shiver. "They are putting up their fixtures in the torture-chamber, and when all shall be ready you are to be led thither, and put to death with agonies that I dare not think of."

O'Brasil's cheek grew a shade paler, and involuntarily his dark eyes turned on Muriel with a glance full of reproachful sadness.

"I know what you are thinking," she said, beginning to twine and untwine her white fingers in uncontrollable agitation. "You are thinking that often and again, in the darkness of night—when Paulett and Red Dick were absent—I might have opened your prison doors and set you free. Oh! why did you not show me a little kindness? I might have sent you forth, but you would have left me behind—left me and forgotten me! But, I will save you yet, O'Brasil! I will—I must! Listen! I have a plan, and its very boldness will ensure success. There is a fisherman and his wife in the house," she went on, speaking more calmly, but in low and rapid tones. "I have bought their clothes, and all their belongings, and given them each a suit in exchange. Now, I propose that we dress ourselves in their clothes, set their fishcreels on our heads—inverted, as they invariably carry them empty—and walk boldly out by the back entrance at which they came in. Outside the gates in a certain grove horses are waiting, ready saddled. From thence a three miles' gallop will bring us to O'Doherty's nearest strong-hold. Once there we are safe."

"Once on horseback we are safe," cried O'Brasil, his eyes lighting with the glorious prospect of liberty. "But should we happen

to be challenged—discovered—ere we reach that point—I have no weapons.”

“I have provided for that, too,” answered the girl. “I can give you a brace of Dick’s petronels and a keen-bladed stiletto he took from some Spanish prisoner last night. They are locked up in a cabinet in my dressing-room. I have this, and I know how to use it”—holding up the jewelled pistolette between her delicate fingers.

“Good! and you would have us start now?”

“At once! there is not a second to lose!”

As she spoke, Muriel went swiftly to the heap of rugs and cushions, and tossing them over, took from beneath them a fisherman’s suit—trews, tunic, huge sea-boots of untanned hide and a long, coarse, shaggy cloak with a pointed, cowl-like hood attached.

“These are yours,” said Muriel.

Then followed a full-kilted, red petticoat; a gown of coarse, brown homespun with a very full-gathered skirt; a pair of trim brogues and cloth-hose, and the inevitable great cloak and hood, of coarsest and shaggiest stuff; and, lastly, a couple of fish-creels, scaly and redolent of fluke and haddock, as were all the articles of attire.

Muriel taking the evil-smelling things designed for her especial use gingerly in her white, perfumed hands, carried them into the adjoining apartment.

A very few moments served to put O’Brasil into the fisher’s shell. Tunic and trews and cross-banded hose were strapped on in a twinkling; he slipped his legs into the huge sea-boots, hung the cloak loosely about him, drew the pointed hood over his head, and, placing the inverted wicker-creel on top, stood fisher-rigged, cap-a-pie, and to all outward appearance, another being.

“I have finished!” he called, softly. “Remember the weapons!”

She hastened again to her dressing-room to fetch them, but in half a minute returned empty-handed! She was white to the lips, her hands shaking; her eyes wild and dark with terror.

“They are gone!” she whispered fearfully—“the cabinet has been opened by a false key, and—they have been stolen!”

“By whom, think you?—with what intention?” asked O’Brasil, anxiously, yet with unruffled coolness.

“I know not, but I fear me it must have been done by Dick,”

answered Muriel in the same whispering, terrified tones, and looking now as if she feared the very walls should hear, "Dick is a deep devil, he is Paulett's master both in cunning and boldness, and I think he suspected me. He knew I saved your life—he knows I hate Paulett. I could deceive Paulett by a smile, but never Dickon! Only yesterday he spoke to me of your unchanged looks, the freshness and cleanliness of your person, your undiminished health and strength under all the horrors of your imprisonment. I laughed, and told him you were a necromancer. Dick laughed too, and then I felt that he half guessed my secret. Now I am sure of it, and he has stolen the weapons, divining the use I might one day make of them."

"Can he be watching you, Muriel?"

"If so, he may have discovered the fisher wights locked up in my linen-closet—but no! Good heavens, I dare not think of it!" "We must go. We must put it to the test; it is life or death now—there can be no drawing back!"

"Let there be no blenching then, brave girl!" said O'Brasil, "perhaps we alarm ourselves unnecessarily, at all events what we do must be done boldly."

Muriel put the fish creel on her head, mouth downwards, and hid her white hands under the scaly cloak.

"Come," she whispered, "my own heart never yet failed me—it is for you! for you! I fear."

"Courage!" said O'Brasil, assuringly; "these wicker creels make excellent masks, they enable us to see without being seen."

"Not so, by the beard of Mahound!" ejaculated a hoarse guttural voice close behind them, "the game's in view, and methinks the run will be somewhat short!"

At the first sound of that terrible voice, Muriel uttered a gasping cry, and O'Brasil started round, with flashing eyes and clenching teeth.

Just above the level of the closet floor, looming up out of the black funnel of the secret stairway, appeared the fierce red face of Richard Corbett. His yellow eyes were fixed on the fugitives with a look of cool triumph and malignant enjoyment.

"View halloo!" he shouted, putting his hand to his mouth and imitating a hunter's cry. "View hal"—

But the mocking shout was cut short ere it was half uttered.

O'Brasil had no weapon, as doubtless, Corbett was well aware; but springing forward, quick as light, he dashed his heavy sea-boot full in the face of the intruder, sending him tumbling backwards on the line of halberdiers that occupied the stairway from head to foot. O'Brasil heard the crash and scramble of their confused fall, as they were driven one over another, down the steep and slippery stairs, as he turned and rushed out of the closet with Muriel by his side.

"I never knew they could open the closet door on that side before," she wailed, as they flew through the first room, "but haste! haste! we may yet escape them!"

They passed through Muriel's bed-chamber like a flash, then through her dressing-room, thence through a luxurious sitting-room, which was the last of the suite.

"If we ever get out of the house, we are safe," breathed Muriel, as she turned the key in the lock. "The guard at the gate will let me pass, though his head should answer for it!"

She flung open the door. But, lo! the corridor without was full of armed men! Shivering in a corner stood the fisherman and his wife, handcuffed, and dressed in the clothes which Muriel had induced them to exchange for their own—all evidently had been discovered!

Directly opposite the door stood Paulett, with a pistol cocked in each hand. All the devil in the man's nature seemed fully aroused within him; there was a line of white froth between his livid lips, which were drawn tightly back from his yellow and fang-like teeth; his eyes had a white, murderous glare; his whole features were convulsed with demoniac fury. All this passed in a few seconds; and in the same time O'Brasil, flinging away the cumbersome cloak and fish-creel, and seizing an oaken chair, dashed into the corridor, determined never to yield alive.

Forgetting his preconcerted plan of vengeance, in his uncontrollable fury, Paulett fired both his pistols at O'Brasil. But Muriel, whom he was holding at the same time, managed by her struggles to disconcert his aim; the deadly missiles flew wide of the mark, one flattening itself against the roof, one taking effect in the body of a soldier, who sprang into the air with a short, gasping cry, and fell dead as a stone.

O'Brasil flung himself on his armed enemies, wielding his improvised weapon with all the strength of his young arm and desperate heart; swinging it around him with sweeping strokes, dealing crashing blows on every side, beneath which men went clanging down in their iron armour, and splintered weapons flew like broken reeds. For a few wild moments it seemed as if the fierce and reckless onset would succeed—as if the single desperate arm would cleave a path to liberty through twenty bristling halberds.

But fate had ordained it otherwise. As O'Brasil launched a terrific downward blow at the head of a tall pikeman, the latter sprang aside to avoid it; the blow in its full force landed on the floor, and the chair was shattered to pieces; while O'Brasil, overbalanced by the impetus of his own stroke, fell forward headlong amongst the scattered fragments of the oaken chair.

In a moment the prostrate youth was seized by as many hands as could reach him, and was soon bound securely.

"To the torture-room!" shouted Paulett—"away with him!"

O'Brasil, once more helpless in the hands of his enemies, was instantly dragged away in obedience to this terrible command. At the same time Muriel Corbett, rending the air with her piercing screams was forced away in the opposite direction by the Governor on one side, and Red Richard on the other.

Chapter 17.

THE IRON COLLARS—UNA'S SACRIFICE.

Una MacLaughlin sat alone in her prison-room as the day wore on. She had received no further annoyance from her persecutor.

She had heard with feelings of a varied character the hurly-burly of O'Brasil's attempted escape; as a wild hope rushed upon her that, haply, the clansmen of MacLaughlin had attacked the Governor's house, with the object of effecting her own, her father's and Irene's rescue.

Once or twice, amid the fiercest of the fight, a voice had reached her ear that for the moment had almost deprived her of her senses. It was a voice jerking forth a few short exclamations of concentrated rage and defiance, each one accompanied by the sound of a crashing blow. With the last broken shout came the sound of a heavy fall. Then the clamour suddenly ceased. The blows, the shouts, the trampling—all grew still !

"It was Shiel's voice!" breathed Una, as she stood listening with heart and ear—listening with clasped hands and parted lips and widely-straining eyes, amid the deep stillness that succeeded the short and savage tumult—"It was Shiel's voice, or else, oh God ! my senses, my reason are deserting me ! Oh, Shiel, come to me !—come to me !—save me !" she cried aloud, in tones of thrilling anguish.

But only the mocking echoes of her own wild voice answered the appeal. After this the day wore on in unvarying silence and solitude in Una's prison-chamber. Her attendants seemed to have forgotten her, as no lights were brought, and as the fair girl sat

drearily in the deep niche of the lancet window, through which not a cheering star-beam came from the gloomy sky, all without and within looked dark as her own destiny.

With a cry of despair at the legion of horrible thoughts and fears that crowded upon her like black and formless spectres, she sank on her knees by the window and began to pray wildly, with quick, white lips, in the darkness, for deliverance or death.

Midnight! and before that hour she was to have been the wife of Paulett! Had he forgotten?—was he going to spare her?—or had some other deed of darkness engaged his attention and occupied his time?

These thoughts had hardly presented themselves to Una's mind when steps sounded in the silent corridor without; the key grated in the lock; the door opened, and Paulett entered, followed by Red Richard, carrying a lamp.

The esquire paused on the threshold, but Paulett advanced boldly, doffing his bonnet with an elaborate sweep as he advanced.

Una did not rise from her knees. She merely looked at him in his gala dress, with wide, frightened eyes.

"My love," he said, going close to her, and posing before her in his extraordinary finery, "pray do not be frightened; we are going to be married now."

The terrible moment, then, had come! and with another wild though silent cry of her soul to heaven for strength to meet it, Una, still on her knees, replied, after a moment's pause, with calm and earnest resolution:

"I will not marry you, Sir George Paulett."

Paulett's temper was an evil one, and his face flushed darkly, but he answered with a forced laugh:

"I shall not ask you then, lady; I shall compel you. I shall take you like a bandit, and you shall yield like an angel—no, like a woman."

Una, with sudden strength, wrenched herself free of Paulett's encircling arm, and turned on him with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks and beautiful, scornful lips.

"I am not one of those who will yield to compulsion," she said, proudly. "I have as strong a will and as firm a heart as your own."

"Bethink you, fair one, I would as soon wed you without

words," he said, lightly, "for a reason that I shall soon make clear to you. Come this way, an it please you."

He took Una's arm and drew it forcibly through his own. To struggle was useless. Shrinking away from his side as far as she was able, and with her disengaged hand holding back the skirts of her flowing white gown, that its folds should not touch him, Una suffered him to lead her from the room.

They passed several corridors, followed by Red Richard with his lantern; thence down a short, wide stairway; then along a dim, stone-arched passage, at the end of which was a flight of stone steps conducting to an underground region; then again through a net-work of darker and still narrower passages, between black, wet walls, under dripping roofs, with the breath of grave-damps and miasma in the tainted air, until they stopped before a low iron door, on which Paulett tapped sharply.

The door instantly swung open; and the Governor, walking with a jaunty step, conducted his fair captive into a long, low, and narrow room, dimly lit by a pair of wax tapers in iron sconces hung against the wall at one end, but whose light was not sufficient to dispel the shadows at the other.

The roof and walls of this chamber, like the passages leading to it, were black and slimy, and dripping with water, the earthen floor was black and slippery; and along one wall was ranged a number of strange and sinister-looking instruments, the like of which Una had never seen before. A black curtain was drawn across the lower end of the chamber, beside which lounged a beetle-browed, dour-faced soldier, with his back against the slimy wall.

A man with a shaven face, wearing a white surplice, and with a prayer book in his hand stood in the middle of the floor, in a waiting attitude.

"This is the good chaplain, sweet Una, whose happy task it is to make us two one," said Paulett, indicating the surpliced figure with a wave of his hand.

The chaplain stepped forward with a profound bow.

"If you are a clergyman, sir, as your dress would lead me to suppose," answered Una, turning towards the chaplain with all the dignity at her command, "you will not attempt to perform any such ceremony between Sir George Paulett and myself. I refuse utterly to marry him! I hate—I despise—I detest him!

And, oh, sir"—with another outburst of sweetest pleading—"I appeal to you, by your sacred character, by your hopes of heaven, to protect me against this unheard-of outrage ! "

"My hopes of heaven would be speedily realised," returned the divine, with a significant smile, "if I ventured, sweet madam, to obey your fair behest. Bethink you, within this good city of Derry, the Governor brooks no opposition to his puissant will."

"I am bound to marry you, willy-nilly," said Paulett, with a light laugh, "In sooth, sweet Una, your father has refused to hand me over your marriage-dower, and we know that beauty should be adorned; and adornment requires gold for its purchase. I have tried to persuade him by the admonitions of these gentle ministers" ---with a sweep of his hand towards the row of sinister-looking instruments ranged against the wall—"but he has been obstinate. Now I deem it likely that he will relent and repent when he sees you made a lawfully-wedded wife before his eyes, and that pleasing spectacle I mean speedily to afford him. Hence it is that I have brought you here instead of to a bower of roses, as would befit your beauty and my love."

As the Governor ceased speaking, the ill-looking soldier in attendance, at a signal from the former, swept aside the black curtain that enshrouded the lower end of the room.

"Look !" cried Paulett, and all the triumph and exultation, all the ferocious hate and vengeance of his evil soul seemed compressed into that one word.

Una turned slowly towards the uncurtained space, her violet eyes darkening and dilating with instinctive dread. There, at the farther end of the long, dark room, appeared three upright rude posts, standing within a few feet of the wall; they were driven into the black earth below and reached to the black roof above, and a long, dark, yawning pit—a grave—stretched out in front of each. At the foot of each post, with his back placed against it, a man was sitting, bolt upright, on a tripod stool, his feet resting on the slimy floor, close to the foot of the grave.

At the first glance Una saw that one of these three men was her father, another the Spanish prisoner, Don Eugenio Del Castillo: while to the third, whose face was slightly averted, and whose huge sea-boots and coarse fisher-gear presented an exterior unknown to her, she hardly gave a glance or thought.

Una gazed at her father for a few seconds in gasping, questioning silence. Then, as her eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity, she saw that his hands were bound behind his back, and that a hideous collar of iron was around his neck—a collar attached at the back, by some means, to the post against which he sat. In the transient glance she afforded the other two, she understood, rather than saw, that they were similarly situated.

"What is it, father?" cried Una, in a voice shrill and sharp with terror. "Why do I see you in that dreadful place? What is that iron collar?"

"I must tell you my poor child," answered the old man, in grave, mournful, tones. "Would to heaven I could have spared you the knowledge; but this dark villain, in his lust of gold, is more ruthless than death itself. This iron collar is a garotte—a Spanish instrument of execution. Sir George Paulett is about to torture me—has tortured me by divers diabolical devices, of which this is the last—to force me to discover and yield up to him that hidden treasure bequeathed to you by your poor uncle. I have offered to yield it up to him on one condition, and one alone. Failing that, the secret dies with me. The condition is, that he sends you and my poor Irene, with these two gentlemen who have shared the tortures inflicted on me, under safe escort to O'Doherty, and that I receive from the chief a written acknowledgement, under his hand and seal, of your safe delivery into his hands."

"You will do this, Sir George Paulett, will you not?" cried Una, eagerly. "There is a pile of gold—it will enrich you beyond your wildest dreams."

"No, I will not do that," returned Paulett, with slow and stern decision. "Think not so meanly of me, sweet Una, as to suppose that I will give you up for a bag of gold—for the round world I would not yield you now! No, dearest, I will marry you, and your father shall dutifully discover where your gold is hidden."

"But sir, my father will not discover, and I will not marry you?"

Paulett laughed sardonically.

"You observe those iron collars?" he said, "they can be tightened by means of a screw—tightened so as to shut off the prisoner's breath in thirty seconds, or so slowly that it would take hours, if necessary a whole day to complete the act of strangulation. Now, the good chaplain here, shall ask you to take me

for your wedded husband. If you say 'yes,' the collars shall remain as they are; if you say 'no,' they shall each get a single turn, and as often as your gentle tongue utters that word, so often shall those screws revolve until death has claimed his victims! These three lives are in your hands—your word alone shall condemn or reprieve them—all rests with you!"

"Refuse!" said MacLaughlin, solemnly. "I am an old man, and I shall purchase the remnant of my miserable days at no such infamous price."

"On my own behalf, senora," said the Spaniard, in his grave, musical accents, "I have but one word to say—refuse!"

"And I!" cried the third prisoner, in deep and thrilling tones. "Una, my love, reject this villian's offer with the scorn and derision it deserves. I would suffer a thousand deaths rather than live for one moment to know you—the wife of that blood-stained monster!"

At the first sound of that voice Una turned towards the speaker, at whom, in her overwhelming terror and concern for her father, she had hardly glanced before, gazing into his face with wide eyes, and parted lips on which the breath of life hung suspended.

"Shiel—Shiel—you—my love!" she panted, after a half minute's tranced and breathless silence. "Oh, heaven, I always knew it—I always felt it," she said, raising her white arms and her violet eyes towards heaven, "Shiel is not dead—not dead—he lives!"

As Una uttered these words, a great light of joy and happiness, a light at once sublime and sweet, shone over all her countenance.

"Turn!" cried Paulett, with a baleful flash in his eyes.

Red Richard and the beetle-browed soldier had placed themselves behind the prisoners, and as Paulett gave this order, by a few swift evolutions of the screws, they tightened the iron collars almost to the point of suffocation. The blood rushed darkly into the prisoners' faces; their eyes started; their mouths opened gaspingly.

"Don't!" she screamed, "I will obey you!" and at another sign from Paulett, the screws were reversed and the hideous collars relaxed.

"Knight of Derry, what ransom do you demand for O'Brasil's life and liberty?"

"Your hand and fortune, madam," answered Paulett.

"And you will set him free when I become your wife?" said Una, in clear, steady tones.

"I will set him free," answered Paulett,

"You will release these three," she went on steadily—"my father, Don Eugenio, and O'Brasil, and set them free as soon as I have become your wife?"

"O'Brasil and the Spaniard—yes," answered Paulett, "and your father the moment he delivers up the dower of my bride. Refuse and the three shall die."

"I consent," said the fair girl, in cold, compressed tones.

"You shall not do it, Una!" cried O'Brasil, passionately.

Paulett advanced towards Una, and took her ice-cold and now passive hand in his.

"Come, fair Una," he said, jauntily, "let the ceremony proceed."

The young girl turned towards O'Brasil, her violet eyes still shining with the light of sacrifice.

"For you, Shiel—for you, my love!" she said, as if the repetition was necessary to strengthen her resolution. "Shiel, I must save you, there is no other way!"

She had spoken the words bravely enough, but still the poor girl lingered—lingered, with her eyes full of the infinite sadness of eternal farewell, resting on O'Brasil's face. She stood thus for a moment, then she turned slowly to Paulett, all the light and colour fading out of her face, as if the soul within had suffered a sudden eclipse. She turned to him slowly, deliberately, her face chilling, hardening—eye and lip and brow—until it looked cold and white, and impassive, as if chiselled in Parian marble.

"I am ready, Sir George Paulett," she said in tones hard and clear as an icicle, from the terrible constraint she was imposing on herself. "I give you my hand for O'Brasil's life—for my father's—for this stranger's—three lives! if this act be a sin in me, may God accept my sacrifice as an atonement!"

With a glance of bitter exultation at O'Brasil, which was yet not all exultation, Paulett placed himself beside the cold, pale, beautiful victim, and ordered the chaplain to proceed with the ceremony.

"I forbid this!" cried MacLaughlin, vehemently. "Remember, Sir George Paulett," said the old man, in his sternest and most resolute tones—"remember, and bethink you of it in

time, you are forcing into wedlock with you a poor and penniless maiden. I give no manner of consent or countenance to this atrocious, this degrading marriage."

"Proceed, proceed!" interrupted Paulett, impatiently. "I shall have these prisoners gagged if they continue to disturb the ceremony."

"Una!" cried O'Brasil, in reproachful and despairing accents.

The young girl turned wildly to her lover, and took one swift step towards him, stretching out her white arms as if, even yet, imploring him to help, to save her.

"Turn!" commanded the Governor, fiercely.

Again the hideous screws revolved with jarring alacrity; and again the three prisoners sat on their tripod stools, their feet quivering on the edges of their open graves, their bodies drawn and writhing in the throes of strangulation.

"Stop! Mercy! Stop!" shrieked Una, covering her face with her hands. "Monster, have I not said that I accept your terms?"

Again, at a signal from Paulett, the iron collars were relaxed, but slowly, and with visible reluctance, by Red Richard and his beetle-browed assistant, and the tortured prisoners were allowed once more to breathe.

"Proceed! proceed!" cried Una, with feverish haste, lest, perhaps, her own resolution should again give way, and lest the ghastly screws should be again applied. She did not look again towards O'Brasil, though with the first breath he found after his partial strangulation, he continued to call on her with passionate entreaty to let him die.

But the chaplain had already commenced his functions. The beautiful victim, cold and pale and impassive once more, as a sculptured image of despair, stood by Paulett's side—she had refused, by an imperious gesture, to kneel at the unholy rite.

Cold and clear and horribly distinct, came the words from between Una's set, white lips that made her Sir George Paulett's wife.

O'Brasil groaned—Paulett's wife—his Una Paulett's wife! With these horrible words whirling round and round in his bewildered brain, thundering in his ears, he sat on his tripod stool, his feet on the verge of that grave, his neck clutched in the iron claw of the garotte and watched and listened like one under

the spell of some frightful phantasy.

The chaplain mumbles a few half-audible sentences. A book is produced, and Paulett writes his name in it. Then Una signs hers, clutching the pen with convulsive grasp, and forcing it heavily along the line with that strong and terrible constraint which she is still imposing on herself. Red Richard scrawls his signature next, and then immediately strides back to the garotte. The beetle-browed soldier makes his mark and returns to his post likewise, and—all is over! And O'Brasil sitting there with a gulf and a grave yawning between him and her, utterly indifferent now to life or death, knows that fate for him, has done its worst.

Then Una's clear thrilling voice, pitched a little higher than its ordinary key, and still tense with constrained emotions: "Now, Sir George Paulett, set O'Brasil free, and my dear father, and Don Engenio. I have given my hand for their lives and liberty."

"Lady Paulett, replied the Governor, laying a peculiar emphasis on the new title, "you forget that your father can only be released when he wisely consents to discover the treasure."

"Surely you will not insist on that condition now," said Una, still keeping a stern rein on her emotions.

"Will I not?" cried the Governor with a hoarse laugh, "Lady Paulett, your husband, though an amiable man, and deeply enamoured of his fair bride, is not quite a fool."

"O'Brasil then," said Una, in imperious tones, "you can have no reason for detaining him a moment longer. Set him free—and the Spaniard" she added, in sudden remembrance of him.

"They shall be free as air presently," returned the Governor, with a grim smile. Una turned her white, cold, scornful face on him with a glance of ineffable and supreme disdain, and repeated, pointing to O'Brasil, but refraining from looking at him:

"Set him free!"

"In good time, madam, all in good time," answered Paulett, with a snaky smile. "Meanwhile let us finish what is so well begun. Brian MacLaughlin," turning to the old chieftain with a lowering brow, "will you now consent to give up Lady Paulett's dower? Or do you prefer to let your lovely daughter live scantily on my poor pension, plying her needle and her distaff like the wife of a kern or a cowherd, instead of playing on her harp or braiding her hair with jewels? Speak, old man, but consider well, for I

swear by the beard of Mahound the word means life or death to you !”

“I will not give up my daughter’s dower to you,” answered the old chieftain, with intense but quiet scorn, “schemer, plunderer, murderer, I will not now, and I will never !”

Paulett was raising his arm to give the fatal signal to the soldier who stood lowering at the back of the garotte, when the deep, sonorous voice of the Spaniard interposed:

“Hear me, senor,” he cried, “before you consummate this dreadful deed, let me repeat the offer I before made to you. I will pay you a prince’s ransom for my own life and for the lives of my two fellow-prisoners. I am rich—name your price.”

Paulett let his uplifted arm fall slowly to his side and stood for a long minute in profound consideration. Then he looked towards Don Eugenio and said:

“For your own life, Sir Spaniard, I will take the weight of your own body in golden Spanish doubloons. Pay and live, an it so please you. But for the lives of these others—why, man, ha ! ha ! is not one of them already ransomed, for a fairer piece than any in King Philip’s treasury ? The other rests on his own word alone.”

An inscrutable look gathered in the dark eyes of Don Eugenio. Then, after a moment’s silent thought, he answered: “I agree to your terms, senor. You shall receive the gold, after allowing a reasonable time for its transmission from my country to yours.”

“During which time you shall, of course, remain my prisoner,” subjoined Paulett.

“Unchained,” said the Spaniard.

“Perhaps,” said Paulett; adding, “Dickon, you may remove the collar.”

In a few seconds the iron collar was removed.

“You must also unbind my arms, Senores Inglesos,” said the Spaniard in his grave, unruffled manner, and without a quiver of visible excitement, as his stately neck was released from the deadly clasp of the hideous garotte. “In the first instance, it is necessary for me to write for the gold.”

At a signal from Paulett his arms were freed, and the prisoner stood up calmly and stately from the tripod stool.

“Brian MacLaughlin,” said Paulett, again addressing the aged chief this time in tones of intensified ferocity, for the unexpected

and persistent obstinacy of the usually mild old man enraged him beyond expression, "once more, and for the last time, will you tell where my wife's dower is hidden? Refuse to tell it, and instantly you die."

"I refuse," said the old man, sternly, "unless on the terms before stated."

Paulett burst into a wild and mocking laugh. "Let the gold go, with a murrain! But comfort your dying heart with the knowledge that I shall find it yet. Yea, if I should sift the soil of Innishowen and strain the waters, pull down the castles and drain the wells." He looked at MacLaughlin with a glance of deadly meaning, "Old man, I will give you five minutes," he said. "If you do not tell me at the end of that time where my wife's dower is hidden, you shall die by—slow—strangulation!"

"Tell him—tell him—oh, father!" cried Una, wildly, as she sank on her knees and held out her arms towards him. "Will you die and leave me living—leave me here? Oh, tell him! father, father! you must not die and leave me!" she continued to cry, in horrified and despairing accents.

There were a few moments of deep silence, during which Paulett paused, his gloomy eye ranging along the instruments of torture, as if debating with himself whether there were any, by the renewed application of which, his obstinate prisoner might yet be bent to his will. Brian MacLaughlin, with closed eyes and uplifted face, seemed now oblivious of the earth and its concerns. He was praying—praying inwardly with the intense tranced fervour of a departing soul. Shiel O'Brasil, it could be seen from the expression of his countenance, was also praying silently.

Paulett's words, and the glance of dark significance that accompanied them, had at last awakened his mind to the truth like a flash of revelation. In reality, he hardly regretted it; though for Una's sake, for the sake of vengeance—but that was all past now. He knew now that his dear love's sacrifice had been all in vain; that in Paulett's treacherous and ruthless soul his doom was written.

"I have won, have I not, O'Brasil?" cried Paulett, standing before his pinioned rival with a triumphant and smiling brow. "She is mine, look you, mine, my very own! You have seen her—this proud and scornful beauty who would have none of me—you have

seen her kneeling at my feet. You see her now resting in my arms—conquered, submissive, obedient—my wife—my sweet minion—what I will ! I reserved you for this—for this you were coaxed back to life, and this, O'Brasil, is my vengeance ! Dickon, do your duty ! Come, loveliest Una. O'Brasil, fare-thee-well ! I go to a couch of roses, you to a bed of worms."

He turned and moved towards the door, dragging his pale and now almost lifeless victim with him.

"Murderer !" gasped Una, struggling vainly in his iron grasp, "dare not to touch me ! Let me die with them !" she cried, pulling the hateful ring from her finger and throwing it from her as if it burned her flesh.

Paulett laughed lightly, and stooping, kissed the beautiful hand on which his ring had lately glittered; while at the same time Una's shuddering ears were filled by a sharp, grating, horrible sound—the sound of the grating screws of the garottes turning round and round in their rusty groves.

"Merciful God ! is there no mercy in heaven ?—can I not die ?" muttered Una. But Paulett still dragged her on. Still she could hear the slow-grating screws of the garottes that seemed to turn round and round in her tortured heart.

Then another sound—a sound like the opening roar of a tempest when its first hoarse blast smites the earth, making it groan and tremble, came to her bewildered senses, mingling in her dizzy brain with the doomful grating of the garottes. Paulett was still dragging her on. Then all at once the hoarse tumult without, the jarring screws of the garottes within, sounded faint and far off in her dulled ear. She had a confused sensation of being flung down violently. Darkness rushed over her, and then came oblivion.

Chapter 18.

THE FLAPPING SAIL—FIGHT OR FLIGHT.

A bower in Buncrana Castle draped in pale-blue arras festooned with silver foliage; the wide windows looking out on a smiling pleasaunce on one side and on the bright waves of Lough Swilly on the other. Within this bower were assembled a small party of anxious persons, comprising O'Hanlon of Orior, the Tanist of Clan-Laughlin, who had arrived some time previously, and was awaiting the chieftain's return, and lastly, Lady O'Doherty, who sat in one of the wide, sunny, seaward windows.

The mystery of the burning of Carn gall Castle had been quite talked out—all the sooner that it was a mystery on which no one could throw any light. "I know, dear lady," said the Tanist of Orior, "that there are but two courses open to an Irishman in these days—he must either fight or fly."

"He ought to fly," said Lady O'Doherty, vehemently. "Greater men have done it—the mighty Hugh O'Neill, the gallant O'Donnell, the warlike Maguire, and a host of others, where are they?—fled—all fled! And O'Doherty alone is left in the midst of his enemies, with all their tilted lances turned against him."

"Here he comes to answer for himself," said O'Hanlon, looking out of the window on his side of the room, "and riding like the northwind!"

The door suddenly opened, and Sir Cahir strode into the room, all cloaked and spurred and mud-bespattered, forgetting for once to remove either his hat or sword.

"Have you learned aught of the burning?" questioned O'Hanlon. Yes," he said, after a moment's pause, "I have tidings of the

burning—bitter tidings ! The MacLaughlin and his daughters, with a traveller who had taken refuge in his house, are prisoners in Derry with Sir George Paulett. For their fate I fear the worst. The people of MacLaughlin's household—his poor servants and retainers—God rest their souls !”

O'Doherty lifted his broad-leaved Spanish hat as he spoke, with a sorrowful and reverent upward glance; and as he did so, a startled exclamation escaped the lips of all.

“Oh, Cahir, what has hurt your brow ?” cried Lady O'Doherty, in terrified tones. The young chieftain's handsome face flushed scarlet, and his eyes began to blaze and scintillate.

He answered through his clenched teeth, “a blow from the ruffian hand of the Governor of Derry.”

O'Hanlon and the Tanist of Clan-Laughlin sprang to their feet, their hands on their skenes.

“What, Paulett— Did he dare do this ?” cried O'Hanlon, his eyes flashing with mingled anger and amazement. “Paulett, you say— —he—he”——

“Struck me and fled—took refuge behind his armed bandits,” answered Sir Cahir, dominating, by a powerful effort, the storm of mad passion that raged within him, and speaking in stern, constrained tones. In the same manner he then briefly and concisely related all that had transpired from his arrival at the blazing castle of MacLaughlin to his solemn vow before the high altar of St. Mura's of Fahan.

“What do you mean to do ?” enquired O'Hanlon, when he had finished——“with Paulett, I mean.”

“Kill him !” answered Sir Cahir, with a wild flash of his blue eyes.

“To be sure !” said O'Hanlon, cordially. “But how to get at the dastard behind his forts and ditches ?”

“Swoop down, like an eagle, on his accursed fortress, seize the forts, burn the city, and chase the foul swarm over O'Doherty's border. Then rouse the clans, north and south, east and west, every good man and true, and drive the invaders off the soil of Ulster.”

“Right again, by heaven !” cried O'Hanlon, with boundless enthusiasm ! “Orior is with you to the death !”

“'Tis said that O'Neill has landed at Torry,” pursued O'Doherty;

"if so, 'tis a direct favour of heaven. But whether or no, we must strike this first blow without him. We will show the false King and his false Deputy that there be enough of brawn left in Ulster yet, to make a stir amongst their bloody brood."

"Oh, hear me, Cahir, hear me!" cried Lady O'Doherty, imploringly, "before you go further in this desperate business. Think how it may end. Think of your wife and child. I have set my heart on leaving this distracted country."

"This is new counsel to the ear of an O'Doherty," said Sir Cahir, with a stern smile, "I should be the first of our race to fly before the enemy. My fathers kept their lands by the sword when necessary. Shame befall me if I do less!"

"Mayhap after all my lovely kinswoman is in the right of it," said Oghie O'Hanlon.

"And to leave the country for a time would be the wisest course. An' that be so, if you will take me for a substitute, I will promise to adjust your quarrel with Paulett, even as you would do yourself, and"—

"I thank you, O'Hanlon, though your words shame me," cried O'Doherty, "I have sworn to kill Sir George Paulett, and sweep his city, to the last stone, off the holy Hill of Derry. I will keep that vow. Now, gentlemen, follow me to the great hall— there I will unfold my plans, and take counsel of your wisdom and your valour. I must also send for stout Phelim Reagh, and summon my clansmen."

Chapter 19.

THE EVE OF REBELLION—CAPTAIN HARTE.

It was night—a night of intense darkness. Not a glimmer of starlight pierced the blind blackness of the inky sky, against which the numerous lights of Buncrana Castle twinkled and shone like wildfire.

No wonder a small party of belated travellers toiling northward with uncertain steps, along the wild lough side on a road which ran between the dark waves and the impending hills, should strain their eyes through the gloom towards those glittering, winking lights that sparkled so invitingly from the windows of O'Doherty's hospitable mansion.

The party consisted of a single horseman, and a coach of great size and small comfort containing a lady, a child and its nurse. The horseman was Captain Harte, Constable of Culmore; the inmates of the coach were the captain's wife and child, with its nurse.

Culmore was a strong fort and castle on Lough Foyle, three miles northward from Derry. It was one of the chief strongholds of O'Doherty's country, but had been forcibly withheld from Sir Cahir by the orders of Chichester, who had appointed to its charge this Captain Harte, with a garrison of some thirty men.

Captain Harte was a good-natured, easy-going Englishman, who lived well and swore hard. He had been that day on a visit to Sir Ralph Bingley of Inch; Inch being another of O'Doherty's castles, but on the opposite side of the peninsula to Culmore, which

was governed by another English intruder in the young chieftain's sore despite.

Captain Harte had finished his fourth bottle of Malvoisie before rising from his countryman's hospitable table. When he did rise he was somewhat unsteady on his legs. The night was looking dark, too, and he was hours too late of starting on his long, rough journey. At a certain turn of the road on their way, the captain ordered his postilion to take the left-hand turn. The postilion suggested the right; but the captain stuck to the left. He was sure the left was the right road to Culmore—left was right, he knew it, and left they went accordingly.

The result was that after plunging for hours along a purgatorial pathway, the lights of Buncrana Castle, began to wink at the captain, and the captain began to wink at them.

"We'll stop at Buncrana Castle for the night, good wife, an we ever make so far," said the captain, dubiously.

"Stop anywhere," moaned the lady.

"Devilish good fellow, O'Doherty," continued the captain.

"Stop anywhere—anywhere!" repeated Mrs. Harte.

"We'll stop at Buncrana, and be damned!" reiterated the captain, in a tone of profound conviction. On stumbled the horseman valiantly. On lumbered the coach, up and down, down and up—jolting, lurching, creaking.

Meanwhile, leaving our befogged and bewildered travellers to pursue their way to Buncrana Castle as best they may, we will take the liberty of going there before them.

Within the castle courtyard was drawn up a picked body of one hundred stalwart clansmen, consisting of sixty kerne on foot and forty mounted gallowglasses. Grooms, gillies, horseboys were moving silently hither and thither, carrying blazing bogwood torches, weapons, harness, arms and ammunition for the supply of late arrivals who had not yet been sufficiently furnished. Soon all the men were completely armed and accoutred.

Sir Cahir O'Doherty was mounted on his black steed, O'Hanlon also on horseback, but without armour, and equipped only with sword and skene moved also hither and thither, examining, appraising.

Lady O'Doherty and Margaret O'Hanlon, standing at the castle door, looked on this scene in silence and with very mingled

feelings.

Phelim Reagh M'Devitt, his pale, set face and stern grey eyes looking darkly out from beneath the rusty peak of a steel morion, stood grim and silent at the head of the gallowglasses. Shawn MacLaughlin, a fierce and gloomy-looking man, loomed like a war cloud at the head of his small body of kerne, with a long eagle feather in his bonnet, and a long spear clutched in his iron hands.

"How now, MacLaughlin," cried O'Hanlon, cheerily, as he rode up to him. "By my hand you look as black as Pol-iffirin!"

"Oghie O'Hanlon, I have a score to pay to-night."

"So have most of us. But your chieftain's wrong makes yours somewhat heavy."

"There is a heavier still—you have heard of young Erna Burke?"

"Yes, yes. Good heavens! was she—something—to you?"

"Everything! You heard how she was taken into the fortress of Derry. It was believed that she had escaped beyond the seas—I believed it. But yesterday a drunken citizen of Derry—I heard him relate it—Dhia! I cannot tell you; but she is dead, my love is dead—she died by her own hand! Guess if you can, O'Hanlon, the debt of vengeance I would pay this night in Derry!"

"Who speaks of vengeance speaks evil," said the deep voice of Father Edmond, who advanced with a severe aspect as the last fierce, hissing word caught his quick ear; "Shawn MacLaughlin, fight like a brave man, but bear no malice. Show such mercy as you would hope to receive."

"Such mercy as she received, so help me God!" cried MacLaughlin, wildly. "Father Edmond, leave me to myself."

"God help you, Shawn," said the Franciscan, moving away with a heavy sigh. "God comfort you, poor boy! Your cross, I know, is heavy."

"All is ready," said Sir Cahir, coming up to O'Hanlon at this moment. "Oghie, where do you choose to ride?"

"By your side, Cahir. You know I have none of my own men here, and can only give you my single sword to-night."

"It is now close on nine o'clock," continued O'Doherty, "'tis time for us to start. We shall march first on the Fort of Culmore

and storm it. That done we shall on to Derry and deal with the villain Paulett and his bandit crew. We have a march of eleven miles before us to Culmore; and by eleven we shall be masters of the fort. By twelve I hope to have our scaling ladders against the walls of Derry."

Thus spoke the young leader; well aware of the dangers and difficulties that were before him, yet confident in his ability to overcome them, and all ignorant of the dark deeds that were being enacted even then, and the horrors that would be consummated within Paulett's grim fortress city, ere he or one of his light-footed hill-men should plant a ladder against the walls of Derry.

"Warder, how goes the night?" cried O'Doherty, addressing the watchful sentinel on the tower-head.

"Dark and quiet abroad, noble chief," answered the sentinel—"dark as a grave, and a storm brewing. Can't see a yard beyond the castle gate."

"So much the better. Remember, my men, silence and darkness are our best weapons. Keep close together on the march, shoulder to shoulder. And not a word—not a sound—not a breath."

The gates were thrown open. But before the cavalcade, with the chieftain and O'Hanlon at their head, could move out, a party of dishevelled and dejected-looking wayfarers moved in. They were Captain Harte, Constable of Culmore, his wife, their nurse and baby. All on foot they were, and all mud-bedraggled, wild, and woe-begone.

"Captain Harte!" exclaimed Sir Cahir, in astonishment and consternation.

"Captain Harte, at your service, damme!" answered that worthy, a little thickly, and winking and blinking furiously in the sudden glare of light, which prevented him from seeing the armed array behind the chieftain. "We were emptied into a bog out there," proceeded the commander, limping forward, as he trailed one disabled limb behind him, "the devil of a nag threw me over his head; my foot stuck in the stirrup, he rolled on me, and my leg is broken into any number of damned pieces—my best leg, too!" Captain Harte clinched this statement in a way that left no room for doubt in his own mind, at least.

"And you came here?" said O'Doherty, questioningly, and with a shade of uneasiness in his voice.

"To claim your damned hospitality for my wife and baby and nurse and self, what else?" returned the commander. "But what's all this?" he added, breaking off suddenly in the catalogue of his mishaps, and winking and blinking as the ranks of armed men, crowding grim and silent behind O'Doherty burst at last on his disordered vision—"eh, what's this?" he repeated, with an imprecation so tremendous that it nearly sobered him, "I heard of no disturbance save the burning of an old castle yesternight." "What—eh—does this mean rebellion?" inquired the commander, growing every moment more sober.

"You are at liberty to call it so," answered O'Doherty, sternly.

"And you are marching on?"

"Culmore."

"Damnation!" ejaculated the captain, emphatically. "I'm going," he added, now thoroughly sobered, and seeming to discover that his leg was not broken into so many pieces as he had at first supposed. "I'm off."

But O'Doherty, putting his horse in motion, intercepted the retreating commander before he had reached the castle gate, and said, with grave courtesy:

"Pardon me, Captain Harte, if this action may appear ungracious or inhospitable; but you must, of course, be aware that it is unavoidable. But since you have had the ill fortune to come here, and see and hear what you have seen and heard, it is absolutely imperative that I should detain you."

"A prisoner?"

"Even so. But your captivity shall be made as comfortable as may be consistent with your safe keeping."

"And my wife and child?"

"Shall be placed in the care of Lady O'Doherty, where every needful kindness and attention shall be duly shown them. I will trouble you for the keys of the Fort, Captain Harte," said O'Doherty coolly.

The baffled commander reluctantly handed up the keys; and O'Doherty deposited them in the bosom of his tunic.

Mrs. Harte, with her baby and nurse, had already been taken gentle and pitiful possession of by Lady O'Doherty and the fair

wife of O'Hanlon; and a few minutes later, Sir Cahir, at the head of his five-score stout hearts, was out on the wild, dark road on his way to the Fort of Culmore.

Chapter 20.

THE FORT OF CULMORE—A STRATAGEM.

Sir Cahir rode on in absolute silence at the head of his men, and in absolute silence they followed him; winding their way along the rugged road in the darkness with almost as much ease and facility as if they had been marching in broad daylight.

It was, in truth, a wild and dismal night; yet O'Doherty could not have desired a better for his daring enterprise. The darkness covered his little band like a friendly mantle, shielding them from every prying eye; while the roaring wind drowned the noise of their horses' hoofs.

At length the light from the watch-house of Culmore glimmered, like a solitary star through the black night, far off across a wide reach of desolate bogland, through which the road wound, a mere blind track, unpaved and unfenced, with deep pools and impassable quagmires lurking on every side. A thick hazel coppice stretched away from the fort for some distance on its westward side, and here Sir Cahir halted his men.

After a few minute's whispered consultation, the purport of which was conveyed rapidly and in the same guarded manner from man to man, the forty gallowglasses remounted their horses, and, with Phelim Reagh in command, drew up in extended order within the wood on both sides of the road.

Oghie O'Hanlon, on his gallant bay, stationed himself alone in the middle of the highway; and the body of light-armed and light-stepping kerne, led by O'Doherty on foot, glided forward with noiseless movements towards the fort.

The body of kerne soon reached a portion of the wood

lying close to the ditch and gate of the fortress. They had hardly disposed themselves when a horse was heard galloping towards the fort, at full speed, along the dark bog-road. On he came, his iron-shod hoofs striking sparks from the flint, of the hard roadway, which was paved for some distance from the gate of the fort.

Presently the daring rider dashed up, and drew rein full in the centre of the broad flake of light before the fortress gate; his horse's fore feet planted on the very verge of the black moat.

"What ho there! Guard—guard!" he shouted in clear, rousing tones.

"Who goes there?" challenged the sentinel in reply.

"O'Hanlon of Orior," returned the horseman, "Your commander, Captain Harte," he continued, "has got into the bog in the darkness; his coach, horses driver and all the rest have gone to the devil, they have plunged into a bog-hole, and the lady and child have sustained serious injuries. The Captain's horse rolled on him, and his leg is broken."

"For guid sake! what the deil's to be dune the noo?" exclaimed the sentinel, who was too true a Caledonian to act without due deliberation.

"Send help and be quick about it," answered O'Hanlon, in his easy, commanding tones—"lights, cloaks, and blankets, litters of crossed spears, and men to carry them. Whatever you do, be quick about it. The captain and his family are in a devil of a fix."

"Guard, turn out!" cried the Scot, rousing up sharply. "The captain's in the bog tae his neck, an' his wife and bairn an' servant lass, and his leg broke tae smash. Coach, horses, an' I lang Sam drooned and' smooored in a boghole! Rouse, there! Lights—cloaks—blankets—usquebaugh—deil be in it, quick, lads, quick!"

In an instant the guard had tumbled out. Quick, excited voices were heard asking questions or giving orders. A rousing bugle-call echoed through the grim, old fortress, followed by the hurried tramp of feet, the flash of torchlight, the buzz of tongues.

The portcullis was raised. The drawbridge fell, clanging and jangling in its iron chains; the inner leaves of the fortress-gate revolved on their massive hinges, and headed by a young lieutenant, carrying a lantern and a brandy flask, and the sergeant of

the guard laden with blankets, the garrison of Culmore rushed out pell-mell across the sloping drawbridge, bearing torches, cloaks, and one or two hastily improvised litters made of crossed spears, bound together with belts, and covered with cloaks and blankets.

"Come along," cried O'Hanlon, wheeling his horse and riding before the excited crowd. "This way, lads, double quick!"

The young Tanist trotted easily along the dark bog-road. The mob of soldiers trotted after him at their utmost speed, their torches and lanterns flashing far and near. On past the spot where Sir Cahir and his bold spearmen crouched under the young green leaves—on towards that point where Phelim Reagh waited with his ambushed horsemen, grim, silent, and intent. On yet a few paces further through the hazelwood copse!

Then with a wild shout the ambushed horsemen sprang from their cover on both sides of the road, and in an instant the soldiers of Culmore were closely surrounded by the flashing axes of the gallowglasses.

"Surrender or die!" shouted Phelim Reagh, "the fort is ours."

The outwitted soldiers gazed on this startling vision for a few seconds in paralysed amazement, and then, with suppressed groans of rage and mortification, as it dawned upon them how hugely they had been befooled, they gave up their arms and submitted to the inevitable.

"Don't take it so much to heart," said O'Hanlon, with a light laugh, as the chopfallen Sassenachs were marched back to the fort, each man held by his wrist in the iron grip of a gallowglass.

"Well done, my gallant Oghie?" cried O'Doherty, grasping his kinsman's hand, as he dashed up the sloping drawbridge. "The fort is ours. All the warders left within have been secured, and everything has been made safe and snug. We have taken Culmore in ten minutes—a good beginning."

"A bloodless victory!" exclaimed Father Edmond, who had ridden with the gallowglasses. "Thank God and Mary! 'twas more than I expected."

"Fall in, Clan-na-Gael, fall in!" commanded O'Doherty, "and now for Derry and the villain Paulett! Bring your scaling ladders, they will be wanted this time. Father Edmond, our next will hardly be a bloodless victory."

Chapter 21.

THE STORMING OF DERRY.

It was three miles from Culmore to Derry—three miles of a somewhat better road than that lately traversed, a road winding closely along the level shore of Foyle. But Sir Cahir's men, flushed with their recent success and eager for the coming struggle, did not linger on the march; and soon two steady lights, shining like two great, staring, watchful eyes through the rayless gloom ahead, showed where the two grim forts of Derry looked through the night.

At the edge of the bog, which was partly covered with birch and dwarf willow, O'Doherty halted his men. The horsemen dismounted quickly and silently, and fastened their beasts in the copse-wood; and Sir Cahir once more divided his men, now reduced in number by the seven stout fellows he had been obliged to leave behind in Culmore, into two equal divisions.

One of these he placed under the leadership of Phelim Reagh and Shawn MacLaughlin. The other he took the command of himself. Phelim Reagh had instructions to storm the lower fort by the river, while Sir Cahir should simultaneously attack the high fort on the hill. The latter defended the gate of Derry and was the citadel and principal strength of the fortress.

Sir Cahir now abandoned the road, which was thickly bordered with houses as it neared the city, and struck across the bog, which, though wet, was a trifling inconvenience to the young chieftain and his light-stepping kerne, who trod the shaking

swamp with shoes scarcely wet over the edges of their soles.

All within the city seemed dark and still; and, as he drew nearer, O'Doherty strained his eyes through the grey gloom for the familiar form of the sentinel, pacing the rampart to and fro between the nearest bastion and the fort. But no sentinel was to be seen. The guard were entertaining themselves in the watch-house of the fort, celebrating their last night's raid on Carn gall Castle, and playing for the plunder they had there collected.

On moved O'Doherty and his men, lightly, swiftly, silently.

After reconnoitring for some moments, Sir Cahir turned a few paces to the right, selecting as the point of escalade a level reach of the wall, within which he knew steps led downward from the earthen rampart. O'Doherty and O'Hanlon dropped lightly into the fosse, side by side; the men scrambled down after them, and in a few seconds the first ladder was raised against the wall by as many strong hands as could reach it.

Sir Cahir sprang up the ladder, sword in hand. O'Hanlon, Cawbar O'Doherty, Black Liam, Macaulay Mor, and as many as could find standing room crowded up behind him. The other ladder was hoisted almost simultaneously. But an unlooked-for disappointment was in store for all—both ladders proved too short! Not one of the men, the chief excepted, could reach the top of the wall with his hands.

Sir Cahir, however, holding his sword in his teeth, grasped the projecting parapet with both his hands, and exerting all his great strength, boldly swung himself to the top, alone and in safety. Then, stretching down a hand to O'Hanlon, his agile kinsman was by his side in a moment. After him came Cawbar O'Doherty, Black Liam, Macaulay Mor, with his two-edged axe in his teeth. These, in turn, lending a helping hand to their comrades, in half a minute the last man had won the wall.

But not a note of alarm from fort or garrison, soldier or civilian—no a breath, not a whisper anywhere!

With a wild cheer, which was echoed by another from the river side, the clansmen leaped down from the ramparts and threw themselves into the fort. The revellers in the guardroom sprang to their feet with an united yell of consternation and terror. Too late! They were met by the dreaded axes of the gallows-glasses; and dropping on their knees they begged for mercy, or

flinging their arms away, strove to escape by the windows.

The timbers of the high fort were soon blazing. Some of the kerne scrambling over the walls, ditches and sod bawns, had also fired the houses nearest the gate; and now the roar of the flames, fanned by the high wind, was added to the sounds of the conflict, and a broad conflagration soon lighted the battle-ground.

The kerne and gallowglasses, stained with blood, and begrimed with smoke and soot, hot with the fierce conflict, and elated with victory crowded around their chief. Sir Cahir wishing to reach the Governor's house without interruption or delay, turned from the principal thoroughfare.

Soon the rear of Paulett's spacious premises was reached, and the lofty garden wall, battlemented and crenellated like the curtain of a feudal castle, opposed their progress.

No one had thought of ladders; but the Innishowen men, with ready resource, sticking their skenes into the interstices of the masonry and stepping on them, or planting their feet in the loopholes, soon scrambled to the top of the wall.

Sir Cahir leaped lightly down into the garden and led the way towards the back entrance. The door was of massive oak, studded with large nails, and it was locked and barred securely.

At the chief's command, a kern placed the mouth of his caliver to the lock and instantly blew it to pieces. Then a few thunderous blows from a tuath drove the heavy door from its bolts and hinges and sent it crashing into the passage.

At that moment a huge boarhound came tearing past them, uttering short, sharp barks, and rushing hither and thither, in and out of the deserted rooms, as if in search of something or someone. "Why, it is Doultagh!" exclaimed Sir Cahir—"poor Irene's hound. Doultagh, Doultagh, old dog, where is your mistress?"

At the same moment a tall, loose-limbed youth came bounding into the corridor with a foot as light and as fleet almost as the hound's. "Gilla-na-bol!" exclaimed half a dozen voices in a breath. O'Hanlon and O'Doherty at once recognised M'Sweeney Doe's fleet-footed cowboy—the same who had brought them the news of Shiel O'Brasil's supposed murder in the Dun of Aileach, some twelve months before.

"Did you see a lady?" panted the cowboy, as he dashed past

them after the brindled boarhound. "Did anybody see"——

"Did you see the Governor?" interrupted Sir Cahir, springing after the cowboy and grasping him by the shoulder of his yellow shirt.

"I did see him, noble chief," answered Gilla, promptly, "he fled by the front door as you came in by the back, with his guard of halberdiers at his heels. I was hiding in the ditch of the bawn opposite, looking out and waiting for"——

"Had he ladies—prisoners—with him?"

"I know not that; but I saw the Red Esquire following him close, with something bulky under his cloak."

"A lady?"

"I cannot tell. I had to crouch down in the ditch when they were passing, and so had not a full view."

"Where did they go?"

"To Corbett's bawn. They have shut themselves up, as I think, in Red Dick's square tower."

"To Corbett's tower!" commanded O'Doherty, and turning as he spoke, he dashed down the broad stairway and out of Paulett's house followed by his men.

"She can't be here," muttered Gilla-na-bo, after making a running survey of the deserted rooms. "Lady Irene! Lady Irene!" he called at the top of his voice.

But only the echoes of his own stentorian tones, as they rang through the silent house, replied.

"Help! help!" shouted a shrill, wild voice from some distant part of the mansion, "help! help! help!"

"It's not the Lady Irene's voice," muttered Gilla, as he made towards the place from which the sound proceeded, "but it's someone else in a bad way."

"Who's there?" he demanded, as he stopped at the heavy, oaken door and shook it vigorously with both hands.

"Who are you?" enquired a sweet, but quick and imperious female voice from within.

"Gilla M'Teg."

"You are not of the Governor's household?"

"Manaam! I hope not, though I'm in his house."

"Hus—s—h! How did you get here? What has happened?"

"I came here in search of Lady Irene Magennis. The Governor

has fled and O'Doherty is master of the city."

"Great heaven ! Let me out ! let me out"—in quick commanding tones, "set me free and I'll reward you well."

"But the door is as strong as a portcullis," said Gilla, once more shaking the massive leaf of oak, and beating against it with his hands.

"Beat it in ! Get a beam—a ladder—anything !"

"But I'll get help from some of Sir Cahir's men when they are done storming Red Richard's bawn. Who shall I say the lady is ?"

"Muriel Corbett."

Gilla threw back his tow-head with an air of amazement, and blew a long, low whistle through his red lips.

"Muriel Corbett—the sister of Red Dick ! That alters the case," he said inwardly. Aloud he asked:

"Who shut you up here, a cailin ?"

"Paulett. Oh, set me free by some means !" cried Muriel, appealingly. "Set me—set me free, in pity !—— I will reward you well."

"I dare not," said M'Teg. "You are Red Richard's sister, and people have queer things to say about you. I dare not. The chief must decide your case. But, if Sir Cahir permits, I will be back as soon as may be, and I will bring half a dozen stout fellows to beat down the door."

"Nay, but Sir Cahir's men will murder me for my brother's doings."

"Sir Cahir's men don't murder women, so bide you easy, cailin ruagh. I will not forget you."

Gilla picked up his ashplant and turned hastily away. He sped along the narrow streets, like a greyhound, and soon reached the turf-bawn that enclosed Red Richard's tower.

O'Doherty and his men had just succeeded in tearing down a portion of the black bawn—a wall or rampart of sods from the neighbouring bog, some twenty feet high by twelve feet thick, which was defended by Paulett with his guard of halberdiers, Red Richard Corbett, and as many of the runaway soldiers of the fort and of the fugitive townspeople as the Governor and his esquire could rally.

"Steady, Clan-Doherty !" shouted Sir Cahir, as he rushed on

with O'Hanlon by his side. "On them, my hearts, spear, skene, and tuagh! Follow your chief!"

Then ensued a wild hurly-burly of promiscuous and deadly fight, up and down the black breach of the rampart. Irish spears and skenes mingled with English halberds. In the thick and forefront of this infernal tumult O'Doherty and O'Hanlon maintained their places, fighting with the skene in one hand, the broad sword in the other, pressing on, step by step, over the weltering bodies of friends and foes, and though aimed at by a score of weapons, as yet safe and unwounded.

As the crowd of soldiers and armed citizens was hurled backward and scattered right and left, their parting ranks, disclosed the form of Paulett, who, standing in the courtyard, armed with sword and pistol, had been vigorously directing, if not personally assisting, in the defence.

"Well met, at last!" thundered O'Doherty, as he sprang towards his foe.

Paulett's sombre face grew livid, and a look of mortal fear came into his cruel and craven eyes, as the young chieftain rushed upon him. The Governor, however, stood his ground; and as his youthful adversary came near, stretching out his arm quickly, he discharged a pistol at his head, but the ball meant for his brain struck the young chieftain's breast, and glanced harmlessly off his steel corslet.

"Rescue! rescue!" yelled Paulett, "what ho there, Dickon! help! help! help!"

O'Doherty, springing upon him, seized him by the neckband of his white satin doublet, and dragged him back with resistless force.

"Rescue! rescue!" yelled Paulett, cringing into the crowd, rescue your Governor!"

But the brutal Governor was hated by the soldiers and citizens over whom he tyrannised, almost as much as by the Irish themselves, and no hand was raised to help him in his dire extremity.

"Where are your prisoners?" demanded the chieftain, with his sword at Paulett's breast, and only withheld from running it through his coward heart by his anxiety to learn, if possible, the whereabouts of MacLaughlin and his daughters.

Paulett instantly recognised this fact, and, to gain time, replied

in as roundabout a manner as possible:

"They are in three separate places; some of which you may have trouble in discovering."

"Name them, or you die this instant."

"Some are dead by this time, and I hope in hell. Some are in the prison vaults under my house. Some have escaped—gone I know not where."

"Where are the ladies?"

"The Lady Una is my wife," answered Paulett, eagerly, and evidently entertaining a hope that this declaration might save him from summary punishment.

"Speak, but beware how you lie to me."

"I left her in my own house."

"Villain, your house was deserted, and Una MacLaughlin would not fly from her friends. Where is Irene Magennis?"

"I know not."

"Take care—no trifling? I ask you for a last time, what have you done with Irene Magennis?"

"I placed her in a room in my own house, and locked the door. When the alarm arose of this attack on the city, my servants, who brought me the news, told me that the Lady Irene had escaped. Her door was open. She had fled or she had been abducted I know not which, nor had I time to enquire."

"Whom then have you slain?"

"Two male prisoners who were found guilty of high treason," answered Paulett, with ready falsehood, "and whose execution I ordered by virtue of my office of Lord Provost of Derry."

"And you dare to avow this fresh crime to me?" cried O'Doherty, "but there!"—flinging his enemy from him as if he were some unclean reptile—"I give you a chance for your worthless life!—On your guard!"

Paulett reeled back, weakly grasping his sword, but making no effort to defend himself. The blazing eye of his adversary seemed to paralyse him. The cold fear of death had seized him. Like most human beings who have shown themselves flagrantly cruel, Paulett was, at heart, a very craven. The young chieftain viewed this exhibition of abject cowardice with supreme contempt and loathing, but with no relenting gleam of pity for the doomed wretch before him.

"Draw and defend yourself!" he cried sternly.

As O'Doherty spoke he drew back his arm, shortening his sword for the death-blow.

"Draw, or I am through you!" he shouted, hoarsely.

Paulett sank cowering on his knees. His sword dropped from his nerveless grip, the swift, vengeful blade flashed down, and the perfidious Governor rolled over on the bloody pavement, a livid and unsightly corpse. The whole fateful tragedy had occupied much less time than it has taken us to narrate it; and in a few moments more the inmates of the tower, bereft of leaders and hotly pursued by the spears and axes of the Innishowen men, for they had not been able to close the door on their Irish enemies, yielded up their arms and surrendered unconditionally.

But where, all this time, was Red Richard Corbett? He was not amongst the slain; neither was he amongst the prisoners. Gilla-na-bo was the only one of O'Doherty's followers who had encountered the Red Esquire within his stronghold;

He had been among the first to enter the tower in pursuit of the routed Derries; and dashing along a narrow passage through which he fancied he had seen someone flying, he found himself in a small, dark, stone-vaulted room, at the farther side of which his keen eyes caught sight of the fiery poll of Red Richard, without hat or helmet, just visible above the level of the stone-floor; while his huge hands tugged and strained at a large stone which seemed designed to close the trap, or passage by which he was descending. Gilla crossed the narrow chamber at a single bound, Red Richard still tugged sullenly at the stone, but kept a corner of his wide-set, yellow eye fixed ferociously on the cowboy, until the moment when his ashen stick, making a lightning whirl through the air, came down with a whizzing stroke, against which no human skull would have been proof that had come in contact with it.

But the Red Esquire had no notion of allowing his fiery caput to be fractured by a blow. Ducking his head below the level of the floor, he dodged the descending stroke, and at the same instant, stretching up a hand, he discharged a pistol at his youthful enemy. The cowboy dropped his formidable cudgel, wheeled half round, and fell; and the stone closed over the mouth of the passage

with a click, as a dozen of Sir Cahir's men burst into the vaulted room.

Immediately following the surrender of the tower, Phelim Reagh, who had taken the fort and castle at the water side, and not only these but the goodly barques in the river, laden with corn and clothing, advanced with his victorious contingent, all cheering wildly, and waving their bonnets, spears, and axes.

They were met by the responsive cheers of Sir Cahir's men And for a few minutes there ensued a scene of tumultuous rejoicing and mutual congratulation.

Chapter 22.

THE WORK OF RESCUE.

When Paulett's house was reached the outer vestibule was found to be in flames, and now the great, square hall, with the broad staircase and passages leading from it were blazing like a furnace and utterly impassible.

"Come this way!" cried O'Doherty, as he dashed around the great quadrangular building towards a portion of the house which, being floored and roofed with stone, had as yet resisted the fire.

"Beat me down that window sash with your tuaths," he commanded.

In an instant the diamond panes and leaden frame flew in splinters from the stone casement, and O'Doherty leaped through the opening, followed by his men.

Leading on at random through the thick smoke that filled the vaulted rooms, O'Doherty stumbled into a dark, descending hallway, which led downward by a deep flight of stairs to another sloping passage, terminating in a narrow, arched door, from the lock of which a large bunch of keys depended.

"The Governor's keys," exclaimed O'Hanlon. "He has forgotten them in his headlong flight.

O'Doherty unlocked the door, and, taking possession of the keys, snatched a torch from one of his men, and advanced into the gloomy gallery to which the door gave entrance. Along this Tartarean hallway the chieftain and his men moved rapidly—stopped before a massive but rusty iron door, Sir Cahir

applied his keys to the lock, pushed wide open the heavy door, and lo ! the long, dim torture-chamber was revealed before them from end to end !

O'Doherty sprang forward, but pausing for an instant within the doorway, swept the grim chamber with a glance of indescribable anxiety. Irene Magennis was not there. But in the centre of the long, narrow room stood Don Eugenio Del Castillo, grave and stately as usual. By his side was stretched out at length on the wet floor the venerable form of the old chieftain of Carn gall, his eyes calmly closed, his white hair streaming over his lofty forehead.

Near them knelt a tall figure in fisher grab, bending over the recumbent form of Una MacLaughlin, who with a rough cloak folded beneath her head, lay prone on the chamber floor like a bruised and broken lily; her white robe all crumpled and bemired.

"Dead !" exclaimed O'Doherty, brokenly. "Mother of God ! both dead ! Am I, then, too late ?"

"Too late !" returned the man in fisher grab, springing to his feet and turning towards O'Doherty with a countenance terrible to look on.

"O'Brasil !" exclaimed O'Doherty, in tones of indescribable astonishment.

"First of all, can anyone tell where is the Lady Irene Magennis ?"

O'Brasil shook his head in silence.

"I do not know that," said Don Eugenio Del Castillo, in his deep, measured, musical tones.

"My friends, the house is on fire—follow me with all speed. MacLaughlin, to you and your men belongs the sorrowful right of caring your chieftain," for O'Brasil had already raised the fair form of Una in his arms, and with the rough fisher's cloak wrapped around her, was carrying her forward with a steady step.

With these words O'Doherty turned quickly from the torture-chamber. The MacLaughlins came close behind, bearing the still form of their aged chief, with suppressed murmurs of wrath and sorrow. Led by Sir Cahir, all dashed forward at their utmost speed, But as they reached that point where two narrow passages branched off at right angles to the wider way, there suddenly

rang out from one of them a sound so wild, so shrill, so harrowing that all stopped short in their headlong flight, and clustered about the mouth of the gloomy tunnel, peering into its low-browed archway with looks of wonder and affright.

"It is a sound that I have often heard," said O'Brasil." "There, at the end of the opposite passage, is the dungeon in which I have been confined since I was first shut up in this accursed place; and I have listened to that horrid cry ringing out from the same spot, and in the same tones, every time Paulett's step was heard in these underground regions."

"We shall soon see," said O'Doherty, snatching a torch from a gallowglass. Sir Cahir soon found the key that unlocked the door, and advanced a step into the cell.

It was a vault measuring some six feet by four, airless, lampless, windowless, walled and roofed with black, slimy and dripping stone, and half filled with an evil smelling, sodden heap that had once, perhaps, been straw. In the centre was crouched up a form so obscured with rags and filth that at first sight it seemed hardly human, but which, on closer inspection, was seen to be the figure of a woman, bent and old.

"Hand me an axe," cried O'Doherty, "quick!"

Cawbar O'Doherty advanced with the implement; and the young chieftain dashed into the forbidding den, and by a few vigorous blows dislodged the iron ring from the wall to which the prisoner's chain was fastened.

They soon emerged and dashed on through the blinding smoke and scorching heat and glare of the vaulted rooms above ground, and, finally, issuing through the window by which they had entered, gained the garden at the rere of the burning house in safety, though not without imminent danger to life and limb. For, in addition to the fierce gusts of flame and showers of fiery sparks and red-hot cinders, that now burst forth in every direction, the lead, with which the roof had been sheeted, was melted by the heat, and streams of boiling metal poured down from the stone gutters on the eaves, threatening dreadful death to all who should come within the radius of the terrific shower.

Wrapping their heads in their cloaks, all retired precipitately through the garden, reaching the street by an iron wicket which they found open.

"We have stormed and taken the city," Sir Cahir explained, hurriedly, in answer to the dazed and startled looks of his rescued friends. "I would I knew where Irene Magennis is," said O'Doherty. "O'Brasil," he added quickly, "may there not be others yet in those dungeon vaults?"

"I fear there are—nay, I am sure there must be," returned O'Brasil. "There are still many cells which you have not explored."

"In what direction?" inquired Sir Cahir, quickly. "These poor prisoners cannot be allowed to perish, I will go back at once!"

"In that case I also will return and act as guide," said O'Brasil, calmly. "I know the whole infernal labyrinth."

One by one the poor captives who had pined in the dark inferno of Paulett's dungeons were rescued and brought back to light and liberty. Guided by O'Brasil, not an iron door remained unopened, not a cell was left unsearched. But Irene Magennis was not found in any. Wearied by his herculean exertions, and feeling depressed and anxious over the uncertainty of his fair friend's fate, Sir Cahir emerged for a last time from the burning house, by no means satisfied that Irene was not still confined in some fiery corner of the doomed building which he and his men had been unable to reach. The same thought, apparently, occurred to Shiel O'Brasil and to Shawn MacLaughlin. Acting on the same impulse, the three young men withdrew to a little distance from the burning house, and gazed up at its long, irregular rows of windows with close and eager scrutiny. Suddenly, while they gazed, a strong, swirling gust of wind lifted the mantle of smoke that shrouded one side of the quadrilateral building, and as it did so, a white arm was flung out and waved wildly through a narrow lancet window, which a projecting outshot had hitherto concealed on a nearer view. At the same moment a long, shrill, despairing cry rang out above the deafening roar of the flames, an agonised face was pressed against the narrow opening from which both glass and frame had been beaten out.

"Muriel! It is Muriel Corbett" cried O'Brasil, in tones of consternation and dismay. "My God! has her wicked brother left her here—to perish? I owe her my life, and I will lose my own to save her. For mercy's sake, O'Doherty, give me your

aid in this ! ”

With a shout the men hoisted a ladder against the wall—hoisted it as quick as light—and quick as light O’Brasil sprang up it.

“Shiel !” cried Muriel, stretching out one arm towards him.

“The roof !” shouted MacLaughlin, in hoarse, frenzied tones.

At the same instant—the instant that O’Brasil, flying upward, touched the top rung of the ladder which was placed beneath the window, and Muriel leaned out towards him—in that instant, there came a sudden crash and roar, as if an imprisoned cataract had burst its bounds and was thundering down amain from some mountain steep—a crash and roar that shook the solid earth, and shook too the hearts of those who looked and listened. A solid column of flame leaped up, fierce and straight and far into the sky, losing itself aloft in a vast volume of black smoke, looking like a vengeful and fire-clad Jove with the clouds and thunderbolts about his head.

The roof had fallen !

The roof had fallen—and in that moment, Muriel Corbett, with a last instinct of self-preservation, sprang out from the breach of the wall, followed by a fierce gust of flame and smoke—sprang not into O’Brasil’s outstretched arms, but clear out, with a mad leap, over him and the ladder on which he stood, alighting in a white heap on the earth below.

O’Brasil was by her side in an instant. With the cloak wrapped about her, they took her up tenderly and carried her away down the long garden, laying her down gently on a bed of trampled thyme, from which sweet odours were exhaling. But Muriel did not feel its balsamic sweetness.

She had the smile still on her lovely face—the rapt look with which she had sprung to meet him to whom she had given her stormy heart. But there was another look there also—a look which meant that for that fair mortal the end of all things had come—the strange and awful and unmistakable look of death !

Muriel Corbett was dead.

Meantime a messenger arrived from Phelim Reagh to inform O’Doherty that a number of the enemy had shut themselves up in the fortified house of Sub-sheriff Babbington and seemed disposed to hold it against the Irish.

Sir Cahir kept O'Brasil by his side as he quitted the garden, followed by his men, leaving behind him the blazing house of his enemy, within which the devouring flames were already waning.

Sheriff Babbington's house was a tall stone building surrounded by a courtyard, which was enclosed by a lofty wall and rampart. The house was outside the city walls, and stood on a slope midway between the High and the Lower Forts. The massive gate of glenwood oak, bound with straps of iron, and with a heavy iron grating in the centre, was shut, and all within was dark and grimly quiet.

"What ho there, within ! Sheriff Babbington !" called Sir Cahir, advancing his white flag.

From within there was no answer; but as he spoke a slim, boyish figure darted out swiftly from the dark ditch that surrounded the courtyard or bawn, and sprang towards the chieftain. As the woodkern approached him, Sir Cahir threw towards him a sharp, questioning glance. Something in his extremely youthful figure, and the fearlessness—or rather the eagerness, with which he sprang forward, pre-disposed the chieftain in his favour, and he suffered him to approach.

"Well, boy ?" he said, questioningly.

"Beware, noble chief !" whispered the boy, coming close to Sir Cahir's side, but keeping his grey mantle well over his face. "Back, back, for God's sake, for you are not bullet-proof."

"What mean you ?"

"There be a score of muskets behind the rampiere."

"Who are you ?" said the chieftain.

Before the woodkern could reply, the face of Sub-sheriff Babbington appeared at the iron grating, and quick as thought, pushed his hand through the iron grating, and aiming for the chieftain's breast, discharged a long-barrelled petronel point-blank at his side. But in the same instant, with a wild cry, the grey-cloaked woodkern flung himself between Sir Cahir and the muzzle of the levelled petronel, receiving in his own body the deadly missile intended for the chief.

The slight form of the boy swayed to and fro for a breathing space, and then fell prone at O'Doherty's feet. With a simultaneous shout of rage and dismay, O'Brasil, M'Devitt, and MacLaughlin sprang forward to the gate.

"Treachery!" cried O'Brasil, and seizing the hand of the Sub-sheriff before he could withdraw it, he hewed it off with a single stroke of his sword; while Shawn MacLaughlin, with a vengeful roar, thrust his spear through the iron grating, and piercing the grim face of the luckless Babbington, drove the impetuous steel so far through his skull that the weapon broke before he could recover it.

The summary and terrible vengeance of the Irish had the effect of striking a panic to the hearts of those within; and as Sir Cahir's men poured down the slope with cries of wrath, the gate was opened on a renewed promise that all within should be free to depart unhurt. A few seconds afterwards the fortified house was deserted by its former occupants, and the Innishowen men were in possession. Meanwhile O'Doherty stooped over the prostrate form of the unknown boy who had given his own life to preserve that of the chief. He raised the slight gray-clad figure in his arms and carried it carefully into the house, stepping over the gory body of Sub-Sheriff Babbington. He bore him into an inner room and laid him down gently on a pile of cushions, and pushed back the deep hood from the boy's head. As he did so a rich wave of raven-glossy hair rolled out over his supporting arm, and a face fair as a flower, with white-lidded eyes and long, dusky lashes—was revealed before his startled eyes. Sir Cahir uttered a wild cry of pain and horror and surprise. The beautiful, calm, pale face on which he looked was the face of Irene Magennis!

He laid the girl back softly on the cushions; he flew to a side-board, and taking a little wine from a silver flagon, again raised Irene's head gently on his arm and poured a few drops between her pale, parted lips. A deep tremulous breath heaved the fair girl's bosom; her dark eyes slowly opened, and rested their gaze on Sir Cahir's anxious face.

"Rene—dear Rene, where are you hurt?" he asked eagerly.

"You?" faltered Irene.

"I am safe, thanks to you, generous girl. But oh, Rene, tell me if you are much hurt?"

"No—yes—no, only my shoulder, I think?" answered Irene, faintly. "Oh, if I could see Father Edmond!"

"He is here," returned O'Doherty, eagerly, "The friar has a good knowledge of surgery, he will dress your wound."

"He will hear my confession," said Irene with a faint, sweet smile.

Chapter 23.

MORNING IN THE TEMPLE MOR—LADY PAULETT —IRENE'S STORY.

The sun was up. The storm had gone with the night, and the laughing light of the young May morning shone from the sapphire sky as if no cloud had ever blotted it.

It shone on the ancient hill of Derry around which the curving Foyle swept in stately measure. The hill smoked, like a Druid's altar, in the morning beam with the smouldering ruins of the English fortress-city. Paulett was dead; and his strong city, so long a terror and an outrage to the people of the North, was a black and tenantless and hideous ruin, within which no living thing now found a shelter.

But high over the blazing and blasted wilderness, over the clouds of smoke and wastes of smouldering fire, the old Cathedral of Columbkille, the Temple Mor, lifted its head in the morning light, majestic and unscathed, while from its tall, slender round-tower-belfry, St. Columb's ancient bell flung out over the ruined forts and homesteads of the invaders, a peal of solemn joy.

The two stately barques lying in mid-stream flaunted at their peaks the pennon of O'Doherty.

Within the Temple Mor the silvery beams of the rising sun fell through the smoke-obscured panes of the shafted oriel windows with a dimmer light than usual. There were Irene Magennis and Una MacLaughlin, and the aged chieftain of Carn gall. There also were Father Edmond, O'Doherty, O'Hanlon, Shiel O'Brasil, Don Eugenio, and Shawn MacLaughlin.

Scattered through the church were various other groups, consisting of wounded men surrounded by their friends and comrades, late prisoners released from Paulett's dungeons, or henchmen and serving men in attendance. In a dim corner of the great church, with her chin resting on her knees, fetterless now, but still in the attitude acquired by long usage to the dungeon and the chain, crouched the ragged and shrunken form of the woman whom O'Doherty had rescued from such woeful durance a few hours before.

Irene Magennis, her slender form wrapped in a rich rug, rested on a pile of cushions that had been conveyed from the house of the late Master Babbington for that purpose. The wound in her shoulder had been dressed and the ball extracted by the skilful hand of Father Edmond. On a couch of a similar kind reclined Brian MacLaughlin, not dead, as O'Doherty and the old chieftain's sorrowing clansmen had supposed, but looking very weak and prostrate. Hovering between the couches of these two, with loving and anxious solicitude, was Una MacLaughlin.

Una still wore the same soiled and crumpled white gown in which she had been conveyed from Paulett's torture-chamber, and the rough, brown fisher's cloak, which O'Brasil had wrapped about her then insensible form, still hung from her graceful shoulders. Near to these, leaning against a column of the ancient church, stood Don Eugenio Del Castillo, looking stately, sombre, and grave, but pale; for in addition to the sufferings he had since undergone, the Spaniard had been wounded in the affray at Carn-gall Castle. Grouped about him were Father Edmond, O'Hanlon, O'Brasil, the stern Tanist of Clan-Laughlin, and Sir Cahir O'Doherty.

The three latter had entered the church only a few minutes previously, having been busily engaged until then in looking after the dead and wounded, and the stores and prisoners taken in the city. In the hurly-burly of the last two hours O'Brasil had neither time nor opportunity to make, nor O'Doherty to listen to, explanations. While his audience hung on his words with the most intense and absorbed attention, O'Brasil told his story clearly and simply; narrating with soldier-like brevity all that had occurred to him from the day he was kidnapped in the Dun of Aileach to the night he was condemned to death for a second time, in Paulett's

torture-chamber, while his disclosures of the Governor's secret atrocities, specially the wanton murder of the poor Islanders of Torry, eclipsing all that had been hitherto known of even his flagrant wickedness, save, perhaps, the still darker episode connected with the tragic deaths of Morion and Erna Bourke, called forth exclamations of horror.

"There is little more to tell," returned O'Brasil, "and I would that any other tongue than mine should tell it."

Then holding his voice and emotions under stern control, the young man proceeded to relate briefly the circumstances of Una's forced marriage with Paulett. The young soldier hurried over the remaining part of his narrative with a voice that quivered despite his sternest self-control.

"At the moment when Paulett, after commanding Red Richard and his assistant to complete their work of murder on the persons of MacLaughlin and myself, was passing out through the doorway of the torture-chamber, dragging along with him the Lady Una, he was met on the threshold by a crowd of panic-stricken soldiers and servants wildly shouting that the Irish were upon them with sword and flame, that the city was on fire, that the forts were taken, and that all the people, men, women, and children, were condemned to indiscriminate massacre.

"Paulett uttered a roar of execration and dismay. He flung the Lady Una back into the torture-room, and, followed by Red Richard, and the so-called chaplain, he fled with the panic-stricken crowd, but closing and locking the iron doors behind him as he went. To free the necks of MacLaughlin and myself from the iron bands which, in a few seconds more, would have completed the work of strangulation, was a service which Don Eugenio performed for us in far shorter time than it has taken me to tell it. To that opportune service, and to the fact that Don Eugenio, by his admirable coolness and ingenuity, had a few minutes previously succeeded in effecting his own release, under God, we owe our lives.

"The Lady Una had swooned as Paulett flung her to the floor. The MacLaughlin sank into a state of insensibility, the result of torture, both mental and bodily, the moment he was released from the garotte. Both were still unconscious when you, Sir Cahir, and our friends came to our rescue."

"And I thought them dead," said Sir Cahir, in low tones. "Shiel, did you not tell us we had come too late?"

"I was thinking of Una," answered O'Brasil, in the same subdued accents,—“too late! yes, too late to prevent that hideous marriage-rite.”

"I," said Father Edmond, gravely, "have already made known to the Lady Una that she is no longer, even in name, the wife of the miscreant, Paulett. Paulett is dead—thank God and Mary! he can hurt or harm the poor child no more! He has paid the penalty of his awful crimes.

A wild and piercing shriek from the dim corner of the church, in which the aged female sat huddled, interrupted the Franciscan's words. All turned their eyes in that direction in startled wonder, and as they did so, the woman sprang from her crouching posture, and drawing up her tall, bony frame to its full height, stalked forward in her bare feet and her fluttering rags—stalked forward with swift, yet wild and irregular steps, and stopped before Father Edmond, fixing her dull, desolate eyes on him with a staring and startled gaze.

"What was that you said about Paulett—what was it you said, priest?" she demanded, shrilly.

"I said that the wicked Governor, Sir George Paulett, is dead," answered the Franciscan, with surprise.

"Dead!" exclaimed the woman, uttering a wail that expressed the very abandonment of despair and sorrow.

"I said Sir George Paulett is dead, and I think, woman, be you who you may, you have little reason to bewail his loss."

"Have I not—oh, have I not?" cried the woman, wildly, "priest, you do not know what you say—I am Lady Paulett!"

An exclamation, half of amazement, half of incredulity, greeted this startling announcement. She trust her hand into her withered bosom and drew forth a small, leathern case which she opened with trembling fingers.

"Look there!" she cried, taking from it a scrap of parchment and unfolding it to view—"look all!—there is the marriage certificate of Johanna Barnwell and George Paulett of Hampshire. I am Johanna Barnwell—I am Lady Paulett!"

Brian MacLaughlin took the slip of creased and yellowed parchment in his feeble hand and examined it attentively.

"She is right!" he exclaimed in tones trembling with joyful excitement. "Look at this, Father Edmond"—handing the document to the Franciscan—"look at it, Una, my child—my daughter was never for one single instant the wife of yonder churl! My God I thank thee that my name and blood have been saved from this intolerable disgrace and degradation!"

"My friends," said O'Doherty, "that she is the wife of Paulett is established clearly enough. That she has been made the victim of inhuman cruelty is also sufficiently apparent."

"Brian MacLaughlin, and you, dear ladies," he said, "and you, Don Eugenio Del Castillo, I beg of you to accept the shelter and hospitality of Burt Castle, to which Lady O'Doherty will at once remove with her household, being our strongest fortalice. I have ordered litters for the ladies, and MacLaughlin. You, Don Eugenio, I presume, will ride?"

"With your fighting men, Senor, if you will so grace me," returned the Spaniard, with a smile.

Sir Cahir approached Irene Magennis, who throughout all these exciting scenes had never once spoken, and seldom opened her eyes, and bent over her with solicitous and anxious looks. Irene's dark lashes slowly lifted, as if in resistless answer to his gaze, and her beautiful, dreamful eyes met his quietly.

"Sir Cahir, my patient must not be excited on any account," said Father Edmond, approaching at this moment.

"I should like," said Irene, glancing around the circle of anxious faces grouped about her couch—"to explain how it happened that I was roving abroad last night,"—with a little deprecating smile—"roving abroad, when the pistol-bullet found me, in the guise of a woodkern."

"You all know that I was a prisoner in Paulett's house, and that Una and I were confined in separate rooms. Of the wrong and evil intended to us both I will not speak, further to say that I had learned that I was to be carried southward beyond the borders of Ulster, to the Lord Deputy. I examined my room, but found that, unaided, I could not escape from it. It was strong as a prison. The window looked out on the garden; and when night fell I broke the glass, and sitting down close to the opening, began to sing—there was a hope someone might hear me. The night was intensely dark, but I had brought the taper

which an attendant had lighted in my room close to the window, and a straight beam of light fell across the dark garden-ground without.

"Suddenly, a familiar sound recalled me to myself. It was the loud bark of a dog, and looking out through a window I perceived Doultagh, my boar-hound, standing in the streak of light under my window, his black muzzle in the air, barking and baying vociferously. The dog must have followed us from Carn gall on the night of our abduction."

"'Doultagh, good dog, Doultagh !' I called softly.

"The poor hound's demonstrations of delight were pitiful to witness. He barked, he raced, and bounding from the earth with prodigious leaps, strove to reach me at the window.

"'Down, Doultagh !' I cried; 'down, good dog, and wait !'

"It was a command which I had given many a time before, and which the hound understood perfectly.

"I looked around my room, espied some writing materials in an alcove, and as my eye fell on them a new thought flashed through my mind. My gold bodkin made a substitute for a pen, and I wrote with my bodkin on a tablet these words, first in Irish, then in English, that they might commend themselves to friend or foe:

"'I, Irene Magennis, am confined in a room in the Governor's house, the window of which looks out on the garden. I will reward with a purse of gold any one who will help me to escape.'

"I then tied the tablet in my scarf, and going to the window, called on Doultagh. 'Take it, Doultagh, take it, good dog !' I cried, throwing it to him. The dog sprang to his feet and caught the scarf as I flung it. 'Take it home, Doultagh !' I cried waving my arm. 'Away ! away ! Take it home, good dog !' He dashed away at full speed, and in an instant had disappeared in the darkness.

"I sat down once more by the window, and began to sing again in a low key. I had not sat thus long when I heard the thud which announced Doultagh's leap over the gate once more.

"In a few seconds a face emerged out of the black shadows into the streak of light. It was Gilla-na-bo ! He held the scarf I had thrown to my dog in one hand.

"Gilla, I called, putting my face to the narrow slit, you got my note ?

" 'Yes, lady.'

"Where were you ?

" 'In Derry, with a creaght of cattle from Doe for to-morrow's fair. I was lying in my cloak out on the fair-green, with the cows around me.'

"And Doultagh, my dog ?

" 'Was wandering about in the streets yestereve, and took up with me, poor fellow ! A little while ago he came tearing along with the scarf in his mouth, and just as good as put it into my hand.'

"I want to escape.

" 'I will do my best, cailin dhas deelish,' returned the boy.

"But how ? The window is too narrow, the door is locked, and there is no other way of exit.

" 'Dhar mo lamb ! I have something here that may chance to help you,' said Gilla, eagerly. 'As I drove my creaght yesterday through the middle fassagh of Innishowen, I found these'—drawing a large bunch of keys from the bosom of his yellow shirt—'I found them in a place where, by the hoofmarks, I knew a troop of horse had been lately picketed. The horse must have been the Governor's; the keys are most likely his.'

"I could hardly repress an exclamation of delight; but I answered in cautious accents:

"It may be so, a bouchal; but how am I to get them ?

" 'An it please you to stand aside a little way, lady,' replied the cowboy, poising the bunch of keys in his hand, 'they shall soon be yours.'

"I stood back; and in an instant the keys came flying through the narrow window, and struck with a loud clang against the opposite wall.

"I snatched them up, and waited for a few seconds in breathless and terrified silence lest the sound of their fall should have alarmed some watchful ear. But all remained still as before. Then I stole to the door, slipped a key into the lock and turned it. My door was open ! Trembling with excitement I relocked the door and returned to the window. I told Gilla that one of the keys had opened the door, that by their means I would try to

make my way out of the Governor's house, and begged him to wait for me near some of the doors of entrance. If you do not see me soon, I concluded, you will know that I have been detected or delayed. In that case hasten to the O'Doherty and tell him that the Lady Una is about to be forced into a marriage with Paulett; that I am to be sent to Dundalk by order of the Lord Deputy; and that torture, extortion, and probably death are to be wreaked on our father.

"I reopened my door and peeped cautiously into the corridor. All there was dark and quiet. I crept softly to the door of the room in which I had seen Una placed before I was conducted to my own. Of the whereabouts of the dungeons to which my father and Don Eugenio had been conveyed, I had no knowledge.

"I found Una's room in total darkness, but soon found that Una was not there—she had been removed. Avoiding every place in which light was burning, I stole on through a maze of dark and crooked corridors, stairways, passages, until I finally reached a narrow postern door giving on a narrow street.

"Looking through an iron grating, with which the door was furnished, I saw dimly in the grey darkness a sentinel with a musket at his shoulder pacing to and fro in front of the postern. After considering for a moment in much trepidation and perplexity, I began to retrace my steps.

"I had noticed on the previous night—the night of my arrival in Paulett's house—an apartment in which a variety of arms and clothing were disposed. I speedily arrayed myself in the livery of the forest, and again reached the postern door. Aware that Paulett frequently employed woodkerne, and, more frequently still, bandits disguised as woodkerne, on his nefarious midnight enterprises, I opened the door boldly and walked out on the street.

"The sentinel challenged me as I approached him at a leisurely pace. I silently showed him the Governor's keys as my passport, and he allowed me to walk on unsuspected. I had only proceeded a few yards along the dark thoroughfare when, with a terrific clangour and roar, the whole silent city seemed to start from its slumber!

"Everywhere and all at once, there was noise, clamour, uproar indescribable! I crouched down into the first ditch, while

every moment the tumult increased around me. Thus crouching and crawling from ditch to ditch and from bawn to bawn, I made my way to the city gate and through the sheeted flames and flying sparks and cinders I was hurried on with a stream of panic-stricken citizens, who carried me onward and along with them in their headlong flight.

"The place to which I was carried along chanced to be that surrounding the Sub-Sheriff's bawn and nothing remained for me but to crouch in my unfriendly resting place until the road should be clear, or until the speedy arrival of the Innishowenmen should set me free.

"There is only one thing more," said Irene, in an anxious voice.

"I have not seen poor Gilla-na-bo since I last saw him in the garden, nor have I learned what befell my courageous friend."

"He was found wounded in the arm in Corbett's tower," answered O'Doherty, "I have sent him on to Burt Castle, where he will be taken care of as he deserves."

Chapter 24.

THE SASSENACHS OVER THE BORDER.

The cavalcade had not advanced very far along the road to Burt when they perceived a horseman approaching on the spur.

The rider was a man of light and sinewy frame. On he came, riding like the wind; but as he approached Sir Cahir he suddenly drew up, and, bowing to his horse's mane, saluted the chief with the usual Irish blessing, which O'Doherty returned in kind.

"I am an O'Neill from Henry Oge's country," began the clansman, "I come, noble chief, to tell you that the Scots and Sassenachs of Strabane, on hearing this morning of your glorious victory in Derry, set fire to the town, and fled in terror—fled, bag and baggage, to the Fort of Lifford, leaving not a foreign face behind them."

"Good news, my brave fellow," exclaimed Sir Cahir. "Their timely flight saves us the trouble of chasing the rabble out of Strabane. Yet I grieve to hear that the good town is burned."

"Santos!" exclaimed the Spaniard, his dark eyes lighting, "the wind of your fame flies fast, Senor."

"And blows hard," added O'Hanlon, gaily, "since it so flutters these foreign dovescotes."

As Sir Cahir and his party traversed the few miles of country lying between Derry and Burt Castle, he was joined by large numbers of his own clansmen, on horseback and on foot, and armed or unarmed according to their resources, and by the time the hill of Burt was reached, some two or three hundred eager hearts had fallen into line behind their youthful chief.

Burt Castle was the strongest fortress on the marches of Innishowen. The building consisted of a massive square keep, having circular towers at its alternate angles, all pierced with embrasures for cannon, and crenellated for musketry. The structure was surrounded by a walled courtyard and a fosse of great width and depth.

As Sir Cahir approached he wound a long blast on his bugle horn; and the gateward instantly lowered the drawbridge across the wide moate, and Sir Cahir conducted his friends through another arched entrance into the great hall. On the dais at the upper end of the hall stood Lady O'Doherty and the fair wife of O'Hanlon, the pale cheeks of both attesting the sleepless vigil of the bygone night. Then followed a hurried explanation as to the guests and patients whom Sir Cahir had introduced to the lady's care. Irene was at once conveyed to an apartment, as far removed as possible from the disturbing sounds of warlike preparation, and to this gentle sufferer the wife of O'Hanlon claimed the privilege of being nurse-in-chief.

Una, worn out by fatigue, suffering, and excitement was fain to retire also. But as she passed on to her apartment O'Brasil managed to meet her in the narrow hallway. It was but a few brief moments, however, that Una and O'Brasil could give to love and happiness—moments snatched amid the bustle and tumult of warlike preparation. Presently the clanking tread of armed men rang in the stone-arched passage, and with a hurried kiss and a lingering clasp, the lovers parted. Una fled up the winding stairway, after the waiting woman who had preceded her, and O'Brasil, turning to the window, stood on in the streak of sunlight, with a deeper sunshine in his own dark eyes.

Hours before, Sir Cahir had despatched mounted couriers, north and south, east and west, to apprise the neighbouring chiefs of the victories of Derry and Culmore, and urging them to take up arms in their country's cause.

His appeal was not left long unanswered. From the hills of Tyrconnell and from the glens of Tyrone, came messengers eagerly announcing their delight at the joyful tidings; and their readiness to strike with the young O'Doherty once more for freedom.

Oghie O'Hanlon set forth on the spur for Newry to raise his

father's men; carrying the warlike message through the clans of Armagh, on to the M'Cartans of Lecale, Magennises of Iveagh, M'Mahons of Monaghan, and M'Kennas of Truagh; calculating truly that the young men of these noble families would spring with hearts of fire to the uplifted standard though their fathers who had out-lived their courage and their hope, and grown grey in their dull despair, should rest inert in the iron yoke against which they had ceased to strain.

O'Gallagher of Tirhugh, on his part, promised to seize Esk Castle; while Nial Garv O'Donnell of Glenfinn, the only powerful chief of his name, after the recent flight of the head of that princely house, offered to seize Lifford, Ballyshannon, and Donegal, on condition that O'Doherty should make over to him half the arms and spoils he had taken in Derry and Culmore.

All day long, numerous herds of cattle and trains of pack-horses, bearing in creels, stores of provisions, arms, armour and other valuable stuffs, amongst which were cups of gold and pieces of plate, might have been seen winding southward from the marches of Innishowen, by the green banks of the Foyle and the Finn, on to the stronghold of the Rugged Nial.

Nial, on his part, swore that the towns of Lifford, Ballyshannon, and Donegal should be in the hands of the Irish ere two suns had dipped their silver beams in the waves of Finn.

"While you are thus engaged on your side," said O'Doherty, "I, on mine, will take the castles of Inch and Doe, the Fort of Donnelong, and the town of Kinnard, which belongs to Henry Oge, the King's O'Neill. This done, Tyrone and Tyrconnell shall be free from march to march. The other northern chiefs, seeing our splendid and swift success, will rise, each in his own lordship, and strike his own oppressor. Within three days Ulster shall see the last of the Sassenachs over the border."

"After that," added Father Edmond, "his Holiness, and Philip of Spain will scarce be so slow with their gold nobles and their Toledo blades."

"We can do without them," said O'Doherty, quietly.

"God fights on the side of big armies," said the Franciscan.

"But he also helps those who help themselves," rejoined Sir Cahir.

Sir Cahir proceeded at once to equip his men, as best he might,

from the armouries of Burt and Aileach. Every available weapon from the old-fashioned arquebuse and Irish short-bow, to the musket, pike, and caliver, then chiefly in vogue; and every species of armour were distributed. When all was completed, Sir Cahir set out with two hundred of his best appointed men for the Island of Inch, the point selected for his next enterprise. Inch is a small island lying near the eastern shore of Lough Swilly. On this island stood one of D'Ooherty's border strongholds, which had been gifted by the Lord Deputy to an English adventurer named Sir Ralph Bingley.

The boats were shoved off; the men bent to their oars, and the little fleet bore away lightly before the land breeze. Standing in the stern sheets grasping the tiller, Sir Cahir led the way with his own division.

"Give way, lads," cried Sir Cahir, briskly, "we shall have a shot presently from Bingley's cannon." Hardly had the words left his lips when the thunder of an eighteen pounder awoke the hoarse echoes of sea and shore, and a cannon ball splashed up the water into Sir Cahir's boat, drenching him and his men with the salty shower. Instantly another shot followed, which tore the oars from the rowlocks of Don Eugenio's boat on the starboard side, causing it to swing round.

"El diablo!" ejaculated the Spaniard, "that shot, *hombres* (men), nearly raked us!"

The men bent to their oars with fierce, united strength, and as they dipped with quick, powerful strokes, their broad blades seemed to grasp the water, and almost lifted the light vessels out of it.

"Bravo—bueno!—we are now too near for their guns to touch us, however acutely depressed," said the Spaniard. "All their cannon are on the battlements."

The boats were beached on the pebbly strand of the island; and as Sir Cahir's men sprang ashore a volley of musketry crashed from the loopholes of the bawn; but before it could be repeated two hundred O'Doherty's had dashed across the moat and were raising their scaling ladders against the walls in twenty different places.

The sun had set behind the high lands of Donegal when O'Doherty's flag was flung out from the donjon tower of Inch Castle. The dead and wounded had been collected and sent first on shore; and leaving a small ward in the island-stronghold, Sir Cahir re-embarked with his victorious clansmen, and the flotilla pulled across the darkening streak of water for the mainland.

Chapter 25.

DOE CASTLE—THE COWBOY'S STRATAGEM.

A week had passed since the storming of Inch Castle; but as yet, Sir Cahir O'Doherty had hardly unbuckled his girdle, or laid the broad sword from his hand.

The morning after the affair of Inch, he had crossed the northern marches of Tyrone, at the head of his fiery clan, and sweeping down, like a whirlwind, on the fort of Donnelong—a place of greater extent and strength, even than Culmore—had driven out its garrison after some sharp fighting, and made himself master of that stronghold.

Pressing on through the glens of Tyrone, the brave Clan-Owen had received him everywhere with acclamation. He had chased the enemy out of Dungannon, and forced them to evacuate every fort and castle along his line of march.

Doe Castle was the last of the strong places which O'Doherty had pledged himself to take, as his opening service against the enemy, and on Doe he was now advancing by rapid marches. The old fortress of M'Sweeney stood at the southern winding of Sheephaven Bay.

When that disastrous peace fell like death on Ireland at the close of the wars of O'Neill and O'Donnell, M'Sweeney had been turned out of his ancient hall and Vaughan had been appointed Constable of Doe Castle. He had taken care to appoint himself custodian of the chieftain's cattle and of all else that he could lay hands on.

It was near midnight when O'Doherty halted his clan in a thick wood within a mile of Doe Castle. The men were fatigued with

their long march, and hungry, for they had tasted nothing since morning, but their creaghts were far behind, and not even a drink of milk was to be had, and they were forbidden to light fires to cook their food, lest they should make known their presence to the enemy.

The task before these weary and hungry men was one of no small magnitude. Doe Castle was a place of great strength. Standing on the brink of the sea, it was washed by the waves on one side, and insulated by a deep and wide fosse, which protected and enclosed it on the other.

It was Sir Cahir's intention to batter the castle with cannon, and he had brought a couple of pieces from Culmore for that purpose. Owing to the difficulties of the way, however, the two pieces had stuck in a bog, and it was impossible to extricate them.

O'Doherty felt deeply disappointed at this serious misadventure, especially as his scouts had brought him information that Marshal Wingfield was marching northward with a well-appointed army to engage him. He had meant to make the action at Doe Castle "thick and short," not choosing to have Wingfield at his heels with thrice his number, and Vaughan's guns in front. Now the capture of the stronghold would be a difficult, a hazardous, and probably a tedious task. The chieftain was well aware that without cannon the fortress could only be carried at a direful cost of life to his gallant clan.

To turn back to Culmore for a new supply of ordnance was not to be thought of. Time was everything. It was his idea to sweep from town to town and from fort to fort, with a speed that nothing could overtake, and with a dash and elan that nothing could resist, and tear them from the grasp of the enemy before Chichester should have time to move the heavy machinery of war in Dublin and the Pale, and hurl it against his light-footed legions.

Hitherto his success had been phenomenal. He had not sustained the slightest reverse, or even check. Garrisons in many places and even whole towns had arisen and fled ignominiously rather than abide his coming. Sir Cahir had a feeling that to turn from the face of an enemy was to turn his back on the tide of fortune, and he determined to go on undauntedly, let what would befall.

His plan now was to steal on the castle under cover of the sheltering woods, and carry it by escalade, with pike and skene.

But he had not the favouring darkness which had so befriended him that night at Derry and Culmore; neither could he count on unwatchful sentries, for since his rising, the northern garrisons had kept sleepless ward at their various posts.

Shiel O'Brasil, with a number of his light horsemen, making a score of stout hearts in all, volunteered for the forlorn hope. They carried a bridge composed of long, light saplings bound together by willow withes, which they meant to throw across the moat; and as they had no scaling ladders, every man took off one shoe as he approached the confines of the wood, the better to enable him to obtain a purchase on the stonework of the rampart he was to climb.

O'Doherty marched with O'Brasil at the head of the stormers—for, notwithstanding strenuous opposition, the chief had decided to lead the assault in person. They advanced cautiously and in perfect silence, the rest of the clansmen following closely in the same manner, and all in light marching order, having left everything behind them save only their fighting gear.

Within a short distance of the castle O'Doherty ordered a halt and he and O'Brasil went forward, for a last time, to reconnoitre.

As the two young men crept forward through the wood with noiseless steps, gliding like shadows from tree to tree, a tall, dark form suddenly sprung up before them, and a hand was laid with a firm grip on Sir Cahir's arm.

The chieftain's sword was already out, as was O'Brasil's and in a moment more their blades would have clashed in the intruder's body had not an unmistakable voice pronounced, in low tones:

"Se Gilla-na-bo !—se Gilla-na-bo !"

"I thought you were in Burt Castle, under treatment for your wounded arm," continued Sir Cahir, with surprise.

"So I was, noble chief," answered the cowboy, "but I couldn't stay, knowing that you were down here in Doe, with your hands against the red stranger—I couldn't stand it!—so, slinging my arm in a scarf, I got up and followed you."

"You followed fast."

"Fast I" exclaimed the cowboy, with a suppressed laugh. "I am here hours ago. I have taken up my old post in charge of the Governor's cattle."

"But I thought you were M'Sweeney's cowboy," said O'Brasil.

"How does it happen that you are herdsman to the robber, Vaughan, as well?"

"I will tell you, vasal," answered Gilla, "when Captain Vaughan took over M'Sweeney's cattle he took over his cowboy too. But I managed to hide a creaght or two in the woods for my old lord, and when I am sent with Vaughan's cattle to fairs and markets I always drive my noble master's too, and make sale of them at the same time; though, of course, if the churl-captain guessed as much he would hang me up for the crows to pick, with an osier gad about my throat for a caravat."

"Well, Gilla," said O'Doherty, "we are going to take Doe Castle to-night." "Would to God the sakers had not stuck in that unlucky bog!"

"Had I been there I could have shown them a firm path around the elbow of the mountain," rejoined the cowboy; "but you won't want them to-night, O'Doherty," he continued, in a low whisper. "I have a great creaght of cattle in the wood to-night, a herd that the bawn would not contain. I told the churl-captain that if the wolves came I could not drive them off as I used to do with this broken arm I have, and Vaughan, who is enraged at the destruction of his cattle, first swore all the oaths he knew, and then ordered me to call the warders if the wolves fell upon the herd. The wolves will come, and I will call the guard," proceeded Gilla. "Do you lie close to the castle gate, and when it is opened, in with you like a Lammas flood in the Owencarrow!"

A few minutes later Sir Cahir's advance guard was drawn up in the wood close to the castle gate, the rest of the men lying a little aback, but as near as they could be brought with safety.

They had not long to wait. Suddenly there arose a hoarse yelp and bark—quick, eager, savage!—and so near that Sir Cahir peered sharply about him in the darkness expecting to meet the glare of a wolf's red eye.

He only saw Gilla M'Teg as he brushed past him with his hands at the sides of his mouth, and immediately there came another outburst of barking, howling, and snarling—sharper, fiercer, and louder than before. A moment later the cowboy was heard at the castle gate, crying in strenuous tones:

"Wolves! wolves! wolves!"

"Where?—where?" shouted a warder on the gate-tower.

"In the wood—a whole pack—haste ! haste ! —Hear ye that?" added the bouchal-bo, as the snarling "yir" and yelp of a real wolf and the frightened howling of cattle came out from the deeper recesses of the forest. "Haste ! haste ! the captain will not be left hoof or horn to-night in Doe !"

"Villain ! go and drive off the brutes, or I'll put a three-ounce bullet in your costard !" yelled the harsh voice of Captain Vaughan, as he made his appearance behind the parapet of the gate.

"I dare not," answered Gilla, "the wolves would scent the blood from my wounded arm and tear me into pieces."

"By the rood, what matter ? Ho there, warders, out ! out !" he continued. "Lower the drawbridge—up with the portcullis—to arms !—to arms ! my men, and handle your weapons deftly—there be five pounds English for a wolf's head, the same as for a Massing priest !"

Down clanged the ponderous drawbridge; swinging out in its iron chains over the wide fosse, filled with salt water. Up rose the portcullis, screeching in its grooves of stone. The castle gate flew open, and out through the dark, low archway rushed the armed warders and serving men, with Captain Vaughan at their head. On they came in an impetuous crowd !—the fosse was passed; with brandished weapons they dashed towards the wood, Gilla running before them like a mountain deer.

"O'Doherty aboo !—aboo !—aboo !"

Like a long thunder-peal the terrific slogan arose from five hundred Irish throats, and with that startling shout Clan-Doherty leaped from their cover, Sir Cahir at their head, and rushed for the bridge like a whirlwind, cutting down all before them.

"Rally ! rally !" yelled Vaughan; "fight your way back to the castle !"

The next moment he was lying prone on the earth, O'Brasil's sword flashing above him, and his foot compressing his steel gorget. The force with which he had been hurled to the earth as O'Brasil closed with him had stunned him, and the overthrown Constable was instantly disarmed and made prisoner. Doe Castle was already in possession of O'Doherty and his men. But short as the combat was, it had been fierce and bloody,

The State chronicles record that only one soldier escaped to tell the tale.

Marshal Wingfield, who, to quote from his own despatch, "had drawn out greedily and speedily upon him, hoping to make a day of it, and to have ended all or some of them," when he heard that the strong castle of Doe had been snatched from the hands of the English, with all its guns and war munitions, and all its creaghts and stores—that its garrison was slain and its Constable a prisoner, turned his back on the youthful victor and retreated in consternation to the Fort of Lifford.

Chapter 26.

A BIVOUAC IN THE WOODS OF NEWRY—THE INTERCEPTED DESPATCH—O'BRASIL RIDES TO THE NORTH.

When O'Doherty marched southward, after the capture of Doe Castle, he found that Nial Garv O'Donnell had not fulfilled his promises, or any part of them. Lifford, Ballyshannon, and Donegal were still in the hands of the English, and Nial had not yet disputed their possession.

Exasperated by this suicidal delay, O'Doherty marched into Nial's country, hoping to arouse that chief to action, by bringing the war within his own borders, and sat down one evening before the Fort of Lifford, with two pieces of cannon and five or six hundred fighting men. When night came O'Doherty held a council of war, and thither came the Rugged Nial, vehement and specious as before.

He now declared himself ready for war, and strenuously insisted on his right to take the Fort of Lifford by his own unaided strength. Sir Cahir agreed once more to entrust this service to him; and decided to continue his march southward, and join with Oghie O'Hanlon in the woods of Newry.

It was night in the green woods of Newry. A hundred camp fires blazed in those mighty woods that had been growing there since timber first grew in Ireland, and around them bivouacked the clansmen of O'Doherty and O'Hanlon, with M'Cans of Clan-Brasil, O'Neills of the Feeva, red-shanked Macdonnells from the glens of Antrim, M'Cartans, M'Kennas, M'Mahons, Maguires, and others of the South-Ulster septs.

One huge fire a little apart from the others threw its red, flickering rays along a sheltered glade, lighting up the boles of the great trees. Around this fire sat O'Doherty, O'Hanlon, O'Brasil, with the rest of the leaders of Sir Cahir's army, and several gentlemen of the South-Ulster clans.

Supper had been partaken of, and the lively rattle of conversation had just been stopped by the arrival of Sir Cahir's scout Gilla-na-bo. Gilla stood by the chieftain's side, belted, spurred, and accoutred in the uniform of an English trooper. His flaxen hair was pushed back beneath the cheek-plates of an iron morion, and his fine, bronzed features and piercing, blue eyes bore out the idea of a soldier who had seen service. He had a sword by his side which was balanced by a handsome dagger and a pair of silver-mounted pistols; he was splashed with mud from head to heel, torn with brambles and wet to the waist, as if he had lately swam across some lake or river.

"Gilla informs me that the Deputy is ready to march against us with the 'rising out' of the five shires of the Pale," announced Sir Cahir, when the cowboy had finished his communications, "and that he will presently be as far north as we were south on our last foray—namely, at Dundalk."

"And this is the month of June!" exclaimed Phelim Reagh, bitterly. "Good God, to think what we might have accomplished ere now, had that man-sworn traitor, Nial Garv, but been faithful to his promises!"

"Let Chichester come," cried O'Hanlon, blithely; "I shall dearly like a pass or two with little Shawn-na-Cobberigh."

"More than half his 'rising out' are Irish," said O'Brasil, "and they will come over to us at the first home-charge."

"I have something else to show you," broke in Gilla-na-bo, taking the jewelled dagger from his girdle, and holding it up in the gleaming fire-light. "As I was riding through the woods of Truagh in my Sassenach uniform yestereve I was overtaken by Red Richard Corbett! He did not know me in my regimentals; but I knew the round, red disc of his ugly visage the moment it came within earshot, he had lost a shoe, and he asked me as he came up if I could direct him to a farrier's forge."

"I told him I knew of one at a little distance, and, as it would not be far off my path, I would guide him to it. We struck off

the highway and took a blind, bridle-track across a boggy country. I knew that for a quarter of a mile the path was firm enough; but after that there came a part where the road suddenly narrowed until there was barely room for one horse, with deep, soft quagmires on either side.

"We were galloping neck and neck—stretching out over the firm, level bog. The narrow pass was just before us, scantily wide enough for a single horse, while the smooth, green quagmire on either side over which a hare could hardly have run without sinking, looked exactly the same as the solid part.

"In a moment I felt the earth vibrating beneath my coppal's hoofs. I knew that I had hit the path—and hit it narrowly! One spring!—I glanced over my shoulder. Dick Corbett's horse was buried to the girths in the bog-mud, while his red rider went soaring through the air like a bomb-shell with the fuse blazing. He came down with a clang on the hard path, and lay there stunned and senseless. I unlaced his corslet, took off his casque and back-piece, and overhauled him from head to heel. As he began to show signs of returning consciousness, I eased him of his pistols and dagger, remounted my horse and rode away.

"This morning, however, as I was tapping the hilt of the dagger against a stone to ascertain if it was solid silver, a spring flew open, disclosing a hollow in the haft, in which I found this."

As Gilla spoke, he pressed a secret spring in the pommel of the dagger he held in his hand, a small valve flew open, and he drew from the recess within, a long, narrow, sealed package, and presented it to O'Doherty.

"By heaven, it is Chichester's!" exclaimed Sir Cahir, glancing at the seal, "and the superscription is to Marshal Wingfield." he added. "Well done, my gallant Gilla!"

Sir Cahir broke the seal, and carefully unfolding a long slip of closely-written vellum, read aloud:

"My commendations to you, Master Marshal. I would exhort you to prosecute the war with vigour against O'Doherty, in the certainty that I will soon be with you; for if this young eagle's wings be not clipped before O'Neill's return, then have we lost our grip of Ireland, and all the rich spoils on which we hoped to fatten. Make fairest promises to Nial Garv (none of which need ever be fulfilled). Confirm to him all the lands his fathers held,

and all that he ambitions to acquire—'twill restrain him from joining with O'Doherty, and he will swallow the hook, though he shall never taste the food."

"Like enough the crooked ways of little Shawn-na-Cobberigh!" cried O'Hanlon, with a laugh, "and by my faith, Nial's posset is spiced and sugared up to his deserts. I could not wish him a better brew."

"Hear him out," said O'Doherty, to whose fair brow a crimson flush had sprung, as he glanced down the succeeding lines; "hear him to the end. The darkest villainy is yet to come!"

"I now commend to you a secret and gentle service which beyond all others shall beget my love. There be a dark lady named Irene Magennis abiding at present in the Castle of Burt, whom I would have you, by force or stratagem, or such means as your ingenuity may devise, to take prisoner, and send on to Dundalk with care and speed, where some are in waiting who will take care of her. The maiden will travel under the escort of the same trusty and gallant gentleman who carries this missive to you. And to lend a colour to the matter in hand, as well as to content good Master Corbett, I would have you seize at the same time the lady's fair foster-sister, Una MacLaughlin, and the old wizard chief, her father, who is reported fabulously wealthy. It is affirmed that he is in possession of the philosopher's stone, and furthermore, that he has compounded with the devil by blood and promise, for an uncounted hoard of money which he has somewhere hidden away, the fiend aiding.

"I doubt not we shall force him to disgorge his hell-earned treasures, and I warrant unto you the chiefest share thereof, while Master Corbett claims the Lady Una as his prize.

"To you who lie so near the rebel's marches, it should not overtax your cunning wit to lure these twin doves into some sweet fool's trap; and where they go the old lord will follow surely.

"So wishing God-speed to your subtlety as to your sword, and the quick despatch of this gentle enterprise, which beyond all others I will best reward, I rest your loving friend

CHICHESTER.

"Given at Dublin Castle, at three of the clock, this 18th day of June, 1608."

As O'Doherty concluded, exclamations of wrath crossed each other from every side.

"Boy, boy, why did you not kill the villain, Corbett, when you had him down in that bog?" broke in M'Laughlin, fiercely.

"I wish I had," answered M'Teg, regretfully.

"Some one must ride to the North with all haste," returned O'Doherty, with his usual decision, "and carry this precious missive to Nial Garv. Hitherto he has wavered and temporised, striving to drive a hard bargain with our enemies as the price of his allegiance, and feeding us the while with false promises. To deceive us farther is now impossible. Still he has power and we must defer to it; and when he learns the Deputy's real intentions in his regard, if he springs to arms, as I know he will, even yet we can retrieve all that we have lost by his falsehood and delay. Who will volunteer for this service?" concluded the chief, glancing around the circle of earnest and excited faces, across which the dark shadows and the red firelight played in intermittent flashes.

"I will" answered O'Brasil in an eager breath.

"here could be none better," returned O'Doherty. "First show Chichester's letter to Nial Garv," he continued, "and, when he has read it, tell him we will march to join him the moment he unsheathes his sword, and long before the Deputy reaches our northern borders Wingfield and his crew shall be knocked to pieces."

"But, Una?" said O'Brasil, anxiously—"that is—MacLaughlin and his daughters—shall not they be warned of their threatened danger?"

"By all means! You shall post a courier from Glenfinn to apprise them of it, and conjure them not to venture outside the castle gates. But you, Shiel, shall return hither on the spur, the moment you have received Nial's answer."

O'Brasil bowed in silence, but his face fell at this unexpected and unwelcome decree.

Half an hour later saw O'Brasil well mounted and well armed, riding northward for Castlefinn at a spanking pace. He carried Red Richard's dagger in his girdle, with the Deputy's letter enclosed once more in its hollow haft.

Chapter 27.

DRAGGED IN CHAINS AT THEIR HORSE'S HOOFS.

"Pray heaven I find the lion in his lair!"

With these muttered words Shiel O'Brasil dashed across a ford of the broad Finn River, and spurred his dripping steed over a wide stretch of green and level verdure, beyond which arose the towering front of Castlefinn, a stately and grey mediæval fortalice, dark, grim, and strong.

Above the low-browed archway of the embattled gate an Irish sentinel was pacing to and fro, his short cloak flaunting at every turn, and his keen pikehead gleaming in the rays of the evening sun. O'Brasil glanced at the dagger in his belt to satisfy himself that his important despatch was safe, and drew up his foaming steed at the castle gate.

"Warder—eirigh-ho!" hailed the horseman.

"Vasal, ho!" rejoined the warder, lowering the point of his pike in salute.

"Tell your chieftain, Nial Garv, that a courier from O'Doherty would speak with him on business of weighty import."

"I would I could deliver your message," returned the warder, "but the Lord of Glenfinn is not at home."

"Pray, whither has he gone, for I must follow him."

"I beg you to enter," said the warder, civilly: "If you would follow my chief you will need a fresh mount and a stirrup cup to help you on your way. You shall find Ever Coil, the cup-bearer, in the hall, who will give you all the information you desire."

By this time the castle gate had been opened, and O'Brasil rode into the courtyard, and, dismounting, threw the reins of his tired steed to a horseboy, and followed a janitor into the great hall, a vast and gloomy chamber, whose lofty, stone-arched roof the tallest kern could not have touched with the point of his twelve-foot spear.

There he was met by Nial's cup-bearer. This man was the rugged Nial's confidential friend and servant, and to him O'Brasil at once made known his errand.

"I would you had arrived two hours ago," returned the cup-bearer. "This morning Marshal Wingfield sent a messenger to Castlefinn summoning the chief to attend his camp at Port Lough, on the southern border of O'Doherty's country, to which place the Marshal has recently advanced. The courier brought a most courteous message entreating O'Donnell to go at once to Port Lough to hear the latest advices from the Deputy regarding the favourable issue of Nial's claims to the Lordship of Connaught and Tyrconneli. Two hours ago he departed on that errand."

"Two hours ago!—yet trust me I have a later mandate here," cried O'Brasil, as he drew forth the intercepted despatch from its secret repository and pointed to the armorial achievement of Chichester still traceable on its broken seal.

Ever Coil's brown face flushed hotly, and his fiery eyes began to glow and scintillate.

"And this—this?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Will open your chieftain's eyes and unsheath his sword."

"Thank God and Mary, 'tis full time!" he answered, fervently. "I would that his warhorn had rung in the glens of Tyrconnell on that Beltaine Eve when O'Doherty's was heard in Derry—but enough! The past belongs to Destiny—the future is still our own. Captain O'Brasil, my lord has but a two hours' start of us—I will accompany you—and we may overtake him. If not, you can halt at some convenient place, and I will carry your missive to him in Wingfield's camp."

O'Brasil was not long in finishing his meal, of which, having ridden fast and far, he was much in need. When he went into the courtyard he found Ever Coil seated astride a servicable looking roadster, while three or four horseboys were holding on

to a fiery grey, accoutred with a rich saddle-cloth, in the Irish manner.

"There's your mount, captain," said Ever Coil, "don't you think that's a decent bit of horseflesh? He belongs to the Bishop of Derry, and was part of the spoil of that city," continued the cup-bearer. "He has not been out of the stable for two months, so keep him well in hand." The wild steed quivered all over as the rider settled himself on his back. But after a few gentle admonitions in O'Brasil's voice, aided by the firm touch of the rein, he consented to go out through the castle gateway. Instantly there was a wild clash of hoofs. A million sparks flashed upward from the flinty road; and with another shake of his head, the unruly brute jammed the bit between his teeth, and went off like a streak of light.

He made straight for the ford of the Finn, and flashed through the broad river like a thunderbolt, amid a clash of foam and spray. After that, O'Brasil knew that the road lay broad and fair before him for many a mile.

"I will give the brute his head and let him go for it—he will tire before his rider," muttered the young man, "and if anything can overtake Nial Garv, this devil of a horse will do it."

He had lost sight of his companion when he swept past the fort of Lifford, giving a wide berth to the enemy. He saw the glittering helmets of a cavalry patrol in the lower road by the river. It was evident that they espied him too, and made an attempt to overhaul him. But the grey horse carried him beyond their ken in a few seconds.

On and on he went, keeping the broad river on the right and the rolling cornlands of Raphoe to the left. The grey horse dashed through the Swilly burn as he had through the rolling Finn. O'Brasil reflected that he was as far as ever off the object of his journey. He had not overtaken Nial Garv, and he began to fear that he would not overtake him; and if Nial reached Wingfield's camp, it was doubtful when or by what means he might be able to convey to him the important information which he possessed. If he entrusted the despatch to the cup-bearer might not the enemy suspect and search him, or perhaps refuse to permit him to communicate with his master?

As these anxious thoughts passed through the young man's

mind he looked back and saw far away over the sunlit downs, just topping the summit of a purple bluff, the form of a horseman, appearing like a dark speck against the opal sky. It was Ever Coil, following far behind at his utmost speed. But as yet O'Brasil's tameless steed showed no signs of setting into a more moderate pace, and at last, as he topped a hill in the long, white road, Port Lough itself shone down the valley before him like a diamond brooch set in the bosom of an emerald robe.

O'Brasil suddenly sawed his horse's mouth with the bit, and, reigning him with a powerful hand, succeeded in forcing the now partly subdued animal to a stand-still. He guided his chafing horse into a clump of timber by the roadside, determined to wait the approach of Ever Coil.

"Well, here we are on the borders of Port Lough," said Ever Coil, as he came up, "and within sight of the Sassenach camp, if camp there be. We have not overtaken Nial Garv. What is now to be done?"

"Hush—sh!" interrupted O'Brasil, raising his hand, "do I not hear the clatter of cavalry?"

Both listened intently. The trampling of horses' hoofs came up from the mist-shrouded valley, and the sound could soon be distinguished approaching rapidly along the winding road.

"English horses, by the jingle of their harness," said O'Brasil.

"Probably one of Wingfield's patrols," rejoined the cup-bearer.

"I will ride boldly forward and meet them; being Nial's henchman, I am well-known and quite safe. But you, captain, are in danger. Thank your stars, you are well mounted—you had better show them your horse's heels."

"Too late!"

As O'Brasil uttered this brief exclamation, the head of the column swept round a curve of the wooded road, and came full in view on the open slope, the summit of which was covered by the thicket within which he and his companion sheltered.

"If I fled now, it would bring suspicion on you," he said, "I shall remain in the wood and trust to fortune, until they have passed."

"Then I will cross the wood, issue forth on the other side, and ride round to meet them," said Ever Coil, putting his beast in motion, while O'Brasil drew a little farther within the timber.

The leading horsemen were three in number, and O'Brasil recognised Marshal Wingfield, with Ridgeway and Lambert, two of his principal officers. Would they pass on and leave him undisturbed? He trusted so. But no! On the very summit of the slope, directly opposite the spot where he was concealed, the trio drew rein, and waited for the arrival of the main body.

The Marshal gazed keenly around him, searching the country far and near, from his commanding outlook, with a suspicious and anxious glance.

Wingfield, whose chest-tones had been silenced long before by a bullet in the throat at the battle of the Yellow Ford, was talking in a squeaky, high-pitched voice, something like a wind-broken bagpipe; and O'Brasil bending forward, with outstretched neck and ear intent, listened eagerly.

"I expected Red Dick ere now with the Deputy's commands," he was saying, "but an' he comes not, I must act without them. Dickon is not usually a laggard when his own interests are at stake, and he deems it his interest to serve Chichester. But whom have we here?"

As Wingfield thus interrupted himself, Ever Coil swept round the wood on the lower side, and emerged on the road between the officers and the advancing ranks of a squadron of horse, who riding three-deep at an easy trot, came on up the slope, their arms and accoutrements gleaming in the fading light of the west.

"Come hither, sirrah!" squeaked Wingfield, sharply. "And who are you, fellow?"

"Nial Garv's cup-bearer, an' it so please you," returned Ever Coil, who having some of O'Donnell's blood in his veins, certainly thought himself the equal, if not the superior, of him who addressed him.

"What made you in the wood just now?"

"I only breathed my horse and let him drink."

"And on what devil's errand hast thou been riding at such a rate?"

"On my Lord Deputy's."

"Hah!"

"It is true. Two hours after Nial Garv departed to join you at Port Lough, there came a courier to Castlefinn bearing a letter from my Lord Deputy."

"Where is this courier?"

"I left him behind me. He was afraid to ride these northern marches with so many armed enemies hovering upon them," returned Ever, shaping his answers with ready ingenuity to avoid the utterance of a direct falsehood, "so I took up his message and came on to seek my master."

"Show me the Deputy's despatch."

"The courier—a captain of horse, I think—would not entrust it to me lest I should be waylaid and robbed of it."

"It must have been Red Dick!" exclaimed Lambert. "What the devil can Chichester mean by this new prank?"

"Where is my master, noble sirs?" inquired the cup-bearer, with ill-concealed anxiety.

"With the cavalry there; you shall see him anon."

The three officers drew their horses aside as Wingfield spoke to allow the advancing troopers to pass on. Ever Coil did likewise, gazing keenly along the ordered ranks as they defiled past for the stately form of Nial Garv O'Donnell.

When about half the squadron had marched past, the remaining half, riding in close order, were all visible on the sloping road.

Ever Coil, from his post on the wayside, and O'Brasil, from his cover in the thicket, looked down the long, undulating lines of burnished casques, rising and falling in the last sunset rays, like the waves of a glittering sea. But Nial Garv's eagle front and eagle feather nowhere broke the rhythmic regularity of the wavy lines.

Ever turned to the officers with a questioning glance.

"I do not see him riding there," he said, the dark thought in his heart finding an echo in his troubled voice.

"He is there," returned Wingfield, wheezing out a tormented laugh, "but I trow he is neither walking or riding—see! yonder he comes!" pointing airily with his sword.

O'Brasil's eyes followed the glittering blade; Ever Coil's did likewise. And there, in truth, came the haughty Nial, not riding, nor yet walking, but running!—running at a trooper's stirrup, bare-headed and afoot, his arms bound behind his back, and a chain passed from his wrist around that of the soldier riding next him on his left hand.

"Great God of justice!" exclaimed O'Brasil, inwardly. "And

this is the proud traitor who betrayed his country in her hour of need !”

“Oh, Nial !—oh, my noble lord !” screamed the cup-bearer, throwing out his long arms towards the chieftain of his house, whom he revered despite all his wrong-doing.

Nial Garv raised his head as that voice reached him—a rugged, leonine head, with the brow and eye of a ruler. But he was hurried on, like a leaf on a wintry torrent. He looked back, and with a fierce tug at his chain almost jerked the trooper out of his saddle, forcing him to check his horse, and partially dragging him from the ranks. There was a line of froth between his dark lips, and in his rugged face, in his awful eyes, the abased look of a lost soul.

“Mo mille bhron !” cried the cup-bearer, in piercing tones—“oh ! my chief, what—what is this ?”

“Retribution !” answered Nial, in terrible tones, “I betrayed O'Donnell—I betrayed O'Doherty—I sold my country's blood to the Sassenach for an accursed ambition, and this is how they pay the score.”

The cup-bearer covered his face with his hand and groaned. “Keep heart, my chief !—there is yet time !” said Ever, also speaking rapidly in Irish.

“Away and tell the men of Glenfinn what you have seen, and”—

“The devil !” interjected Marshal Wingfield, in startled tones.

The sudden exclamation was not caused by the self-accusing words of his prisoner, which Wingfield had seemed maliciously to enjoy but by a long, loud, and resonant neigh from O'Brasil's horse in the thicket, which had become particularly unmanageable since the near approach of so many of his kind.

“Throw me a volley into the wood there !” cried the commander, in a shrieking key.

Instantly half a dozen musketoons and petronels crashed out together, their bullets whizzing about O'Brasil unpleasantly near, tearing up the turf beneath his horse's hoofs and rattling through the branches of the trees above him.

At the same moment the grey horse, either hit or frightened, bounded from the earth, with his whole four legs at once; then

with a snort and a mad plunge, bolted forward, not from, but right towards the enemy.

O'Brasil tugged furiously at the rein, exerting all his skill and power to head the animal in an opposite direction.

In vain ! With the bit jammed between his teeth, like a vice, he dashed straight through the wood, his rider narrowly escaping being brained by the out-spreading branches. In sheer desperation, O'Brasil snatched his sword from its scabbard, and holding it in his teeth, together with the bridle, had just time to cock a pistol in each hand as he charged headlong into the English line.

The powerful grey cannoned against Wingfield's charger, at the first shock, and emptied the Marshal's saddle incontinently; while O'Brasil, discharging both his pistols at once, to right and left, emptied two others. Then sweeping his sword around him, with clenched teeth and flashing eyes, hacking and hewing on every side, the young captain of horse shot through their triple ranks, like a meteor. He had leaped the fence at the farther side of the road and was away across the open country beyond, almost before they had seen him. Ever Coil was close behind him, riding for his life.

At the moment when O'Brasil had issued from the thicket on his runaway steed, the cup-bearer saw at a glance how matters stood. Quick and daring, he suddenly gored his horse's flanks with the spur, and, leaping forward, with one swing of his tuagh, lopped off the arm of the trooper to whose wrist Nial Garv was chained.

"Come on, O'Donnell !" he shouted, slashing with his skene at the thong that bound Nial's wrists—"jump on my horse's back!" Nial Garv leaped on the back of the steed at a single bound, and with a wild yell, the cup-bearer dashed through the lane cut by O'Brasil.

The whole manœuvre scarcely occupied more than one breathing space. And he was gone—the dark chieftain of Glenfinn was free ! As the devoted clansman lifted his horse to the fence across which O'Brasil's grey hunter had just shot, like an arrow, Nial Garv, who still dragged the bleeding arm of the trooper at the end of the chain fastened to his own wrist, was suddenly jerked from the back of the flying steed, and hauled back breathless and

senseless to the feet of his triumphant captors. A soldier who had just been unhorsed by O'Brasil, and who was lying prone on the earth, had seized the severed limb as it flashed past him, and hanging on to it, had brought O'Donnell to the ground.

"Pursue them ! After them ! Shoot them down !" roared Ridgeway and Lambert. The Marshal was still hors de combat. Fifty troopers instantly leaped across the roadside fence and gave chase, discharging a scattering volley as they came on.

"Ride, ride, Ever !" called O'Brasil, glancing back over his shoulder. "Hurrah ! we shall escape them yet !"

But already the young captain of horse was too far in advance of his brave companion for his cheering voice to reach him. It never reached him more. Even as the words left O'Brasil's lips, a shot from a musketoon crushed through the cup-bearer's skull, scattering his brains abroad.

Chapter 28.

THE RUNAWAY—HOW THE RACE ENDED.

A few spent balls dropped harmlessly about O'Brasil; but he was already out of range of the enemy's firearms, and was soon out of reach of pursuit.

He had not received a single scratch in the melee, but he noticed now, with intense annoyance and alarm, that he had lost Red Richard's dagger, and with it the Deputy's despatch, which he feared would now fall into Wingfield's hands.

A Sabre-slash had slit open his tunic from neck to waist, cutting through his girdle, and the dagger, consequently, had fallen to the ground. He was soon out of sight of his pursuers,, and with his intimate knowledge of the country, had no fear of being overtaken.

He would gladly have drawn rein,, but the maddened steed would not be stopped or stayed. At length the massive keep of Burt Castle loomed up before him on the right, bringing the gracious vision of Una before his ardent fancy, and renewing the sweet hope of seeing her which he had hardly dared to whisper to himself as he set out on his northward journey.

"Come, good horse," he went on, patting the animal's neck. "So ! coppaleen—so ! good horse !" coaxing him in his softest voice, while he endeavoured to head him in the direction of Burt Castle.

The ill-tempered brute only shook his head and dashed on like a demon. O'Brasil strained at the bridle until the sinews of his wrists cracked. He might as well have tried to rein a whirlwind. On he went and on. The hill of Grainan, crowned by its hoary Dun, arose before him in the deepening twilight. Up its long foot-slopes the grey horse thundered with unabated speed. Would the furious brute dash his brains out, and his rider's, against the stonework of the Cyclopean pile?

While his anxious eyes were still fixed on the grey wall of the impending Dun, there came a dull, thunderous roar through the hushed, golden gloaming.

"Horse!" muttered O'Brasil, whose practised ear understood the sound—"and English!" he added, as a few seconds later a troop of Wingfield's cavalry topped the summit of the hill above him, and came streaming over its heath-clad crown, like black silhouettes, outlined distinctly against the lingering rose light of the west. They were some twenty in number, probably a foraging or scouting party, and in half a minute he would be in their midst.

On went the wild grey, and on came the troopers, the turf shaking beneath their horses' hoofs.

"Halt!" shouted the sergeant in command, as he came within hail.

O'Brasil was neither able or willing to obey the mandate.

"Cut him down!" cried the sergeant. And at a rapid order the troopers deployed in line across the hill-side, and swept down the slope with sabres drawn.

O'Brasil set his teeth hard, and drew his sword with the reckless courage of despair. He entertained no vain hope of cutting his way through a troop of twenty horse, bearing full down upon him, alert and determined, with ample notice of his approach, and with the fall of the ground in their favour. With a silent prayer in his soul to God and Mary, mingling with a swift, tender thought of Una, the young man plunged the spurs into his horse's reeking flanks, and the wild brute shot forward, like a thunderbolt.

Just one terrific bound!—then a short, gasping cry!—and horse and rider disappeared from view. Both had gone headlong into a sudden and deep ravine that intersected the hillside; and

the heavy thud of their fall came up ominously from the misty bottom.

The English troopers, coming on at full speed, saw the catastrophe, and were warned of their own danger. They had barely time to save themselves by wheeling their horses sharp from the dangerous brink; but colliding with each other in the manœuvre, more than one horse and man rolled on the heather; and confusion and discomfiture were the immediate result.

When their own casualties had been attended to, some of the troopers climbed down into the narrow, misty gorge, and found the grey horse lying at the bottom, with his neck broken. But greatly to their surprise, his daring rider, dead or alive, was nowhere to be seen.

"Where am I?" was the question present to O'Brasil's mind as he opened his heavy lids and gazed wonderingly up at the low and narrow roof extending above him. It was a single row of huge gray slabs, laid horizontally across walls composed of inslanting rows of similar great, gray stones, all unchiselled and uncemented. The long, narrow chamber was filled by a dim, uncertain light, hardly more than sufficient to disclose its darkness; and the atmosphere was redolent of some strange sweet herbalic odour.

"A tomb!" exclaimed the young man, suddenly finding his voice, but not yet his memory, and shocked by his own altered and hollow accents—"Good God! how long have I been here?"

"A week and a day you are here," returned a wild, but soft and pathetic voice.

O'Brasil attempted to turn towards the voice, but, astonished at the weakness that enchained him, he closed his eyes with a deep groan, and made no further attempt to move.

He had a vague remembrance of a time given up to wild, fever fantasies, blended with visions of a shadowy form flitting constantly about him; of a pallid face, and sad, tender eyes, bending over him; of cool hands about his burning brow; of a soft, cooing voice that lulled and soothed his disordered senses; but this was all.

Grey Granu was bending above him, waving a bunch of fragrant herbs over his face. O'Brasil rested his eyes on the white face of his nurse in a long, wondering gaze.

"Granu!" he murmured.

"You know me, poor boy!" cried the woman, in the same strange, sadly soft, and thrilling tones.

"I saw you before."

"On another day of danger."

"Yes. Where—where am I now?"

"In the Grey Woman's Cave in Grianan Hill."

"Ah, I remember!" My horse threw me—I had a fall."

"Rest you, my boy; you are safe now and will soon be well—rest, and speak no more."

"But the troopers—where are they?"

"Gone with the ill wind that brought them."

"And how did I escape them? How did I come here?"

"You fell into the hazel screen that hides the mouth of my cave; I was there; I saw you fall, and took you in."

"Did they not search for me—the Sassenachs?"

"They did search; but the Grey Woman had hidden you, and against her their bloodhound instincts were at fault."

"Have you seen any Sassenach soldiers in this neighbourhood?"

"I have seen one—the red-haired brigand who waylaid you in the Dun of Aileach. Yesterday he was riding across the mountain in the disguise of an Irish kerne."

"Corbett! Good heavens, while I lie here as useless as a log."

It was some time before he was able to speak, and when he did it was only in a whisper.

"Granu," he said, faintly, "I have a message of warning for some friends in Burt Castle—a message of life and death. Can you find me anyone who will carry a letter thither?"

"I will carry it myself."

"What, to-night?"

"To-night, if you have it ready."

"I cannot write," he said, with a groan of vexation.

"Would you wish me to write it for you?" asked Granu.

"You?" said O'Brasil, looking at the forlorn creature with unconcealed surprise; for in those days few females were taught to read; fewer still to write; and even among women of good condition such accomplishments were not always to be found.

After a moment's thought the young man dictated a few brief lines to Una, warning her of the threatened danger and evil in-

tended to herself, her father, and Irene Magennis, and entreating her not on any account to venture outside the castle gates.

"Granu, where under heaven did you learn to write?"

"In a world of which I have long ceased to be a part—a world where there were youths and maidens, loves and lovers. You will laugh, but I once belonged to such a world—I Grey Granu of the Cave!"

"Why should I laugh at that?"

"Oh, laugh—laugh; why should you not?" returned the Grey Woman, wildly. "I do when I think of it—laugh, laugh, laugh!"—with a wild burst of bitter, mirthless mirth—"to think that I had a lover once who must needs teach me the art of writing."

"Where is that lover now, Granu?"

"Why, he deserted me after all this love—cast me off like a poisonous weed; left me with the brand of shame and the brand of blood, and the curse of desolation for ever and ever! this is what love means in the world to which I once belonged."

"I believe in love, Granu—in love and happiness. I could not laugh at the wreck of mine."

"Could you not, a bouchuilin dhu?" breathed Grey Granu, suddenly changing her wild and bitter mood to one of plaintive tenderness. "Oh, then, may yours never, never be wrecked or darkened!"

"But for you, I and all my earthly griefs and joys would have been dark enough ere now in the grave," rejoined O'Brasil, gratefully, "and when I am strong enough to wield a sword, let me know the name of him who wronged you, and, I swear by the heaven above me, and by the life I owe you, to make him rue the"——

"Hush—hush!" interrupted the Grey Woman, vehemently, "you do not know what you say."

She went quickly out of the dim chamber and speedily returned, carrying a fragrant draught in an antique cup of bronze.

"Drink this," she said, raising the young man's head, and get well, and when you have gone to sleep I shall take your missive to the Lady Una."

O'Brasil, too weak to resist his nurse's mandate, drank obediently; then, sinking back on his pallet of leaves, closed his eyes wearily. Grey Granu sat by him until he fell into a deep,

restful sleep; then gathering her rough cloak about her, she glided from the cave—away, with her swinging, rhythmic step, through the mists and the dim light towards Burt Castle.

When O'Brasil opened his eyes once more the same faint ray still illumined the cyclopean cave. He glanced quietly around him. Grey Granu was seated near him on the floor, her faded eyes gazing out straight before her. Her long, pale, slender hands rested palm-downward, on something which the young man recognised as belonging to him. It was a small, deerskin case that contained a treasured relic from which the young soldier never parted, and which constituted the one solitary link, and the only one he had ever possessed, that connected him with the mystery of his unknown origin.

"Give me that!" he exclaimed.

Grey Granu started from the floor and came towards him hastily, at the same moment thrusting something red-coloured out of sight amongst her grey draperies.

"What is that—my torn scarf?" questioned O'Brasil, "my one, poor heirloom."

"I know—I have seen it," interrupted Granu, placing the leathern case in his hands. "I found this when I was undressing you to look at your hurts; your fall had burst open the cover, exposing its contents half of a silken scarf of crimson, wrought with a cabalistic scroll in gold, all rudely torn across, I suppose your fair lady has the other half?"

"I would I knew who had the other half! You are mistaken, Granu, this is no lady's favour."

"No? Yet methinks I have somewhere seen a scarf—a scroll—like that, and in a lady's hands."

"Where—where?" cried O'Brasil eagerly. "The answer to that question might resolve the problem of my parentage!"

"Think you so?"

"I am certain of it. A scarf, a scroll like that, once seen would not be readily forgotten. Oh, where did you see it—with whom? For heaven's sake, tell me what you know of it—tell me, and I will bless you forever as my benefactress!"

"Or curse me!" rejoined the Grey Woman, with a strong shudder. "My boy, it is only one of my dreams—tell me where and how you became possessed of that half scarf, it may assist

me to enchain my thoughts and memories, and connect them with some material forms."

"That I will gladly do, so far as I know it. Some two-and-twenty years ago, after a storm, a child of perhaps one year old was picked up by a fisherman of O'Doherty's country, afloat on the waters near the coast of Tryconnell, and lashed to a spar by that torn scarf. I was that child. I was named after the fairy Isle of O'Brasil, which shone that day on the horizon with remarkable splendour. The scarf, brodered with its mystic characters, was preserved by my kind fosterers in hopes that the remaining half might one day be discovered, or that it might, in some way eventually throw a light on the mystery of my birth. The torn scarf, being the only thing to which I am really entitled, I have therefore adopted as my escutcheon. And now you have as much of its history as I know myself."

"You know nothing more than this?" said Granu, after a long pause. "Think, is it all a blank?"

"Alas, yes! I can recall nothing—nothing! Granu, can you not help me? You seem to know something of me—to have seen me before, or someone of whom I remind you. Tell me, for God's sake, who is that one? Tell me something, I beseech you—anything! You cannot imagine of what vital importance this question of parentage is to me."

"Calm yourself; this undue excitement will bring back your fever. A dream I have of that torn scarf—a vision of wrath and dread, enveloped in clouds and tempests; but I cannot see it to-day. Storin, I will think and pray! One day God will bring it forth out of the shadows, and you shall know it all. And now my brain swims, my heart is weary, I see nothing but darkness—let this pass. You do not ask me about your letter."

"What, you have not taken it already?"

"I have taken it, and you have slept a long night since. This is a new day."

"Did you see the Lady Una?" with quick eagerness.

"I put your missive into her hands."

"Did she ask for—ask any questions?"

"None; to avoid answering any such I left her the moment I had given her your billet."

After this O'Brasil progressed rapidly towards convalescence, notwithstanding the fact that his mind was far from easy. His nurse studiously avoided all reference to the exciting themes which had moved her patient so deeply, and herself, perhaps, in even a more intense degree.

In three days, by his nurse's aid, he was able to make his way through the dark, subterranean chambers and narrow passages connecting them to the mouth of the outer cavern—a small opening in the side of the ravine, overhung by a dense mass of over-blooming heather bending from the bank above; and further screened by a thick growth of wild hazel bushes.

Here on the warm turf O'Brasil reclined, while the sunlight glinted through the leaves making a green-golden twilight where he lay. Throughout all the hothours of that long, June day the young man lay there, wrapped in his cloak, under the hazel leaves. He still felt dizzy and weak, but the sunshine and air refreshed and strengthened him.

"In another day I shall be able to go to Burt Castle," he told himself.

He begged Grey Granu to procure a horse for him for that purpose, proffering her sufficient money for its hire. But, to his surprise, his kind and indefatigable nurse, who had hitherto proved omnipotent in providing for his wants and wishes, shook her head in silent indication that she would not or could not comply with his request. A horse, therefore, was not to be had. On the third day he felt much better and stronger. He climbed the bank of the ravine, and strolled down the hillside.

"I shall be able to walk to Burt Castle to-morrow," he concluded, rejoicingly, as after a long ramble he threw himself down exhausted, under a shady bank; and with the yellow sunlight glinting on him through the ferns, and the clear song of the birds in his ears, he gave himself up to sweet dreams of Una.

Instantly, as if in reply to his love-shaped questionings, there broke on his listening ear, not the fragrant sigh of the breeze burdened with a lover's dream, but a hoarse boom and roar and shock that made the light leaves quiver in the crystal air, and sent the affrighted birds twittering to their cover in brake and fern, echoing far down the mountain along its heathery dips and hollows, and growling, like low thunder, about the hoary dun

above. That heavy sound was one which the young soldier knew full well.

"Cannon!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet and gazing with dilated eyes towards Burt Castle, from which direction the sound travelled. The lofty towers of O'Doherty's noble hold were clearly visible from the spot on which he stood; and even while he gazed, another deep-throated roar pealed through the air, and a dense cloud of dun smoke sprang up between him and the donjon keep, enveloping it in sudden gloom.

"Good heavens, can it be that they are cannonading Burt Castle?" he exclaimed aloud, in amazement and consternation.

"Yes, they are cannonading it; it has been closely invested for the last three days. That was the reason why I did not get the horse for you to ride thither."

The speaker was Grey Granu, who, unknown to O'Brasil, had been watching over him from the bank above.

"My God, my God!" groaned the young man, striking his clenched hands against his forehead, in bitter agony, "and all this while I have been feeding my heart with hope—dreaming delusive dreams—for this—this awakening."

Chapter 29.

SURRENDER.

It was evening, hot, breathless, still. A great bank of thunder-clouds brooded heavily over the dark bosom of Lough Swilly, and the sun was dipping down behind them with a lurid, unearthly glare.

On that evening most of the inmates of Burt Castle were gathered in an upper chamber of the square donjon keep whose windows afforded a view of the beleaguering force that encompassed the ancient fortress on all sides, as well as of the wide country rolling out beyond.

A common community of danger and misfortune—a great and terrible crisis in the lot of all—had so drawn them together.

Burt Castle had capitulated.

The ward numbered only fourteen men. The ordnance, arms, and ammunition, that would have rendered the stately stronghold of O'Doherty all but impregnable, had been long ago handed over to Nial Garv. The English cannon had made a breach in the eastern face of the donjon keep, and damaged one of its round towers.

Yet, notwithstanding these disadvantages, the idea of surrender had been met with fiercest opposition by the majority of those within the Castle.

“All is not yet lost. Sir Cahir will march to relieve us. If he do not, we shall die at our posts, and find a grave and a monument in the ruins.”

Such vehement protestations were heard on every side. But Lady O'Doherty opposed herself to these heroic sentiments; she shrank from danger; she was averse to the shedding of blood, and the constable of the castle supported her.

An hour before, the conditions had been drawn up between the constable and Lady O'Doherty on one side, and Sir Thomas Ridgeway and Sir Oliver Lambert on the other. By these conditions all the refugees within the castle were to be permitted to return to their homes without hurt or prejudice. The warders were guaranteed life and liberty. Lady O'Doherty and her household should have leave to depart whithersoever they pleased; all were to be protected against injury or insult, and finally, possession of the fortress was not to be yielded until the following morning at daybreak.

The enemy, however, had advanced close to the fosse, surrounding it on every side, and jealously guarding every outlet to prevent the possibility of escape for those within.

Lady O'Doherty, serene and cold and lily-fair as usual, sat by a window in the fading sunlight, while the nurse held her little dark-haired daughter curled up rosily in her lap. Margaret O'Hanlon stood near her sister-in-law. Bryan MacLaughlin sat at the other side of Lady O'Doherty, and Una knelt by him, her white arms entwined around his neck, her blue eyes looking into his full of love and terror.

The old chief's tremulous hand rested protectingly on his daughter's golden head, and his faded eyes returned her gaze with one of mournful tenderness.

A little behind these stood Irene Magennis, where a heavy piece of tapestry fell between her and the window. Irene's lovely, lustrous, velvet-dusk eyes had in them a wild and hunted look, and an expression bitter and dark as death had settled on her pale features.

Yet, woman-like, her thoughts were not of her own danger, but only of him she loved, and of this first great catastrophe to the cause on which he had staked his all.

"Oh, Cahir!" she exclaimed, in an anguished half-whisper, striking her fair hands together, "where are you, good God! what have we done? You left us your noble hold to keep and guard, surely we should have guarded it with our lives. Your gates

were strong, your towers were high, your walls thick and lofty—why, why has the place been yielded ? ”

“ Because the Constable of the Castle was not a warrior, nor its lady a heroine,” returned Margaret O’Hanlon, whose light step was at that moment heard in the round room.

“ There are few heroines,” answered Irene, without turning her face from the broken wall. Her sense of honour and her sense of delicacy forbade her to join in any condemnation of the wife of him she loved, however fully her inward thoughts endorsed it.

“ The wife of O’Doherty ought to have been one,” cried Margaret, hotly. “ If the eagle stoops to mate with the barnyard fowl he cannot expect her to soar to his eyrie, or being there, to guard it;” proceeded Margaret, walking up and down the narrow room with the air of an angry pythoness. “ What would any heroic wife have done with this strong castle, instead of yielding it to her husband’s enemies with such a quiet heart ? Why, defended it until its towers came crashing down about us, stone by stone—fought it from fosse to gate, from gate to hall, from hall to stair, from stair to battlement, and died, if need be, in its reeking ruins ? But we are here—and we have lost the fortress ! ”

“ But Margaret, I want to tell you—to ask your counsel ”——

“ Yes, Rene ? ”

“ I have seen a face down yonder amongst Ridgeway’s men—I saw it as I looked down just now, peering through the breach in the rampart—a dreadful face that makes my soul sick with horror—the face of Red Richard Corbett ! Oh, Margaret, what will be our fate—Una’s and mine—when he enters this castle gate to-morrow, as a conqueror ? ”

“ Oh, my God, is the Red Esquire here ? ” gasped Una, who, passing into the tower room at that moment, had overheard her foster-sister’s words.

She went forward to the aperture and looked out shudderingly.

“ I see him ! I see him ! ” she cried, recoiling to the opposite wall with a long, sharp, quivering cry, “ he is at the breach still, and, oh, Rene—Margaret—he saw me, and he had the horrible audacity to touch his casque and waft a kiss—to me !—the moment I put forth my head.”

Margaret went forward and put her arms around her.

“ Take comfort,” she said.

"In what?"

"He is not the officer in command, who may, you know, be an honourable man, and who may compel his subordinates to respect the conditions of the capitulation."

"If I knew that the English ever had respected their engagements with us—but when I know that they never did"—

"Sir Cahir may come yet before morning, and raise the siege at the eleventh hour," put in Irene, hopefully.

"Oh, why did we surrender so soon?" wailed Una.

"We I!" echoed Margaret, fiercely.

"I mean the Constable and Lady O'Doherty."

With the first streak of day the inmates of the castle were all astir, indeed few of them had lain down overnight. Six o'clock was the hour fixed for the opening of the castle gate, and as the moments sped many a wild look was strained over the wide country for a sight that none were fated to see—the sheen of Sir Cahir's banner or the glitter of his spears and tuaghs.

Irene, Una, and Margaret O'Hanlon were assembled on a small barbican, where the angle of a projecting turret sheltered them from the observation of the enemy below.

"What will it mean for us?" repeated Una, fearfully.

"Liberty to leave this beleaguered castle, freedom from insult and annoyance, for such are the express conditions of our surrender," returned the voice of Lady O'Doherty, with a little irritation apparent in its calm, measured tones. "I have been in search of you, and I find you here linked together, like the weird sisters, forecasting evil."

When the clock at the end of the great hall chimed the half-hour all were assembled in that apartment.

"Already I!" faltered Una, clinging closer to her father's side as the single stroke fell on her startled ear.

Lady O'Doherty took her place near the door. Her perfect coolness and confidence imparted itself to her household in some degree, and had the effect, at least, of restraining the passionate storm of sorrow and lamentation that was ready to burst from every heart.

Irene and Una had at first thought of attempting some disguise which might shield them from the evil eyes of their dreaded enemy, Corbett, but had finally given up the idea as futile.

The old chieftain of Carn gall placed himself between his two fair girls, giving an arm to each..

Suddenly six loud strokes rang out through the silent hall—the final hour had come !

As the last stroke sounded, up went the portcullis, the massy bar was removed, and the iron gate rolled open with a sharp, shrill screech, as of a living thing in anguish.

The Constable was at the gate to meet the commanding officer, and to deliver to him the keys of the castle.

"Lady O'Doherty and all her household are in the great hall ready to pass out," said the Constable. "When may they come forth ?"

"Now," answered Ridgeway, curtly.

They came in procession, the Constable and Lady O'Doherty first, then came Margaret O'Hanlon, followed by MacLaughlin and his daughters; after them the remaining ladies with their children, the servants, and men-at-arms.

Lady O'Doherty glanced around, wondering a little at the singular disposition of Ridgeway's troops. Within the courtyard a body of halberdiers was drawn up across the open gateway. At the opposite side a party of twelve musketeers was posted within a dozen paces of the castle wall, facing inwards, with their forks planted and pieces levelled.

Midway between these two stood three officers, Ridgeway, Lambert, with a bandaged shoulder, and a third, clad cap-a-pie, in burnished steel armour, with his visor closed.

"What can all this mean ? Unseemly bravado !" thought Lady O'Doherty, with a thrill of high displeasure.

"You are the rebel's pretty wife, I presume ?" began Ridgeway, staring in that lady's face with insolent freedom as she drew near, and with unflinching effrontery ignoring the fact that he had met her on the previous evening while the terms of surrender were being drawn up, taking care to treat her with especial courtesy.

"Sir Thomas Ridgeway's memory must needs be as short as his honour and courtesy appear to be scant if he fails to recognize the Lady O'Doherty, or to remember that he is chief party to a treaty to which yestereve he set his hand and seal, and whose conditions, by his ungentle and unknightly bearing, he is now so

flagrantly violating," replied the Anglo-Irish dame, with becoming dignity.

"Hear ye this, my masters?" cried Ridgeway, turning to the wounded officer with a grin; "the rebel's wife speaks of conditions! The only condition I wot me of at present is that the dame must be in a condition of lunacy. Madam"—to Lady O'Doherty—"hast enough of sense left to understand that thou art my prisoner?"

"Surely," cried the startled lady, shrinking from the rude hand the officer sought to lay on her shoulder, "surely you cannot mean to act in such an infamous manner! By the terms of our surrender"—

"I am those terms, madam. By what singular miscarriage of reason could you have deemed it otherwise? Jeff"—to the captain of halberdiers—"take the prisoner away;"

Lady O'Doherty without further ceremony was seized by both wrists and led roughly aside.

"Sir Thomas Ridgeway," pleaded Lady O'Doherty, "will you not now permit my friends and servants?"—

"Answer my questions, ask none!" interrupted Ridgeway, sternly, "or I will close your pretty mouth with an iron branks! Come hither, black-eyed beauty!"—this to Margaret O'Hanlon. "Prithee, what name is sweetened by your wearing of it?"

"I am the wife of O'Hanlon," returned Margaret, with haughty dignity.

"Wife! Another wife, by heaven! Lambert, these Northern jer-falcons have mated themselves with cushat doves, and hear me swear it! Fair mistress, I approve your spouse's taste, and but that you are one of those whom I am expected to take prisoner, and find free lodging for in Dublin Castle, I vow I would have dearly liked to show you how much a King's officer can admire a rebel's choice."

Margaret, standing gracefully erect, her dark draperies falling about her, her little, white teeth clenched behind the ripe, red lips, her proud, black eyes drooping haughtily under their silken fringes, affected a lofty oblivion of the rude soldier who addressed her.

"Whom have we here?" he added, passing a rapid glance

from Irene to Una, both of whom had drawn their scarfs closely over their faces.

"My daughters," answered the white-haired chieftain of Carn-gall, in tremulous tones.

"Guests and friends of the Lady O'Doherty, and therefore, I trust, to be respected," put in Margaret O'Hanlon, hastily.

"Oh, we will respect them," rejoined Ridgeway, with a leer. "We of the soldier trade are gallant men, and women always claim our fealty. Unveil, fair deities, that we may worship you!"

The two girls stood motionless. Margaret O'Hanlon, conquering her pride and anger for the sake of her fair friends, condescended to plead with the insolent victor, "I pray you, fair sir, let them pass unquestioned."

Ridgeway laughed boisterously, and Margaret bit her lip with vexation. She saw that her humiliation gratified but did not move him.

"Unveil, unveil!" he cried, "I mean to be obeyed."

"Obey, my children," said MacLaughlin. "God help us, resistance now is useless."

The two girls flung the lace from their faces and looked at Ridgeway—Irene with a calm dignity, a sense of power that never deserted her, in her dark, splendid orbs; Una with gentlest, sweetest, wildest pleading in her tearful, violet eyes.

At the same moment the burly officer, who all this time had stood glaring through the bars of his closed aventayle, threw up the mask of steel, and revealed the repulsive visage of Red Dick Corbett.

Irene's great dusky eyes dilated a little, and her red lips came closer together. Una uttered a suppressed scream and clung to her father's arm.

Poor frail old father, who had no power to shield her! Of the two he was to be pitied most!

"You see now the game is worth the candle, Sir Thomas," said Red Richard triumphantly. "These be the three I told you of, and these be my prisoners."

"Lady O'Doherty!—oh, Lady O'Doherty!" cried Una, despairingly, "can we not be taken with you?"

Lady O'Doherty grew white to the lips. She threw an imploring look at Ridgeway, who merely glanced significantly at Captain

Jeff. The captain of halberdiers stood beside his fair prisoner, holding in his hands one of the horrible gags of the good old times—a frame of iron bands made to fit over the head and neck, and having an iron plate to enter the mouth and compress the tongue, thus ignominiously and painfully preventing speech.

Jeff tossed it airily from hand to hand. Lady O'Doherty looked at the degrading thing, shuddered, and remained silent.

"Remove your prisoners, Captain Corbett," said Ridgeway.

Una had fainted at Ridgeway's feet. Her father and Irene knelt beside her, supporting her insensible form.

Red Dick strode forward and raised her in his arms with a possessive air.

"Lead on to the lady's chamber," he said, addressing Irene, authoritatively.

Irene reeled as she entered the castle door, and, unable to proceed, paused, looking back. Looking back through a million flashing, scintillating wildering rays that danced and quivered before her swimming eyes, she saw, as in a dream, the fair form of Lady O'Doherty, with her nurse and baby, the dark beauty of Margaret O'Hanlon, the towering bulk of the Constable, moving in procession through the long archway of the basecourt, accompanied by an armed guard, going prison-wise.

Then again rang out the horrid voice of Ridgeway:

"Ho, churl! what have you to give? Come, come, pay or die! Nothing? Did you give all your substance to forge rebel pikes? Provost, by G——, another unprofitable! We are like to waste lead rather than win gold in this rebel hold. By Lucifer, give him his billet!

With a deep shudder, Irene sprang forward, closing her ears with her fingers that she might not hear the volley of the murderous platoon.

MacLaughlin followed, keeping close to his daughter's side.

By the time the chamber was reached Una had recovered from her swoon, and springing from Red Richard's arms, with a cry of terror, she threw herself on her father's breast.

Chapter 30.

ONE LITTLE HOUR.

Red Richard seated himself with the utmost coolness.

"Sit down all," he said, "I have something to say to you."

MacLaughlin led his daughter to a chair and placed himself beside her. Irene sank into a prie-dieu, and the eyes of all turned anxiously on their victorious jailer.

He sat eyeing them for some moments with grim and silent exultation.

"Well, sir?" said MacLaughlin, with a show of his old dignity.

"Well, you and your daughters are my prisoners."

"I am sufficiently aware of that."

"You shall know it better yet—understand me!—not only are you my prisoners, but you are mine!"

"What do you mean to do with my children and myself?" demanded MacLaughlin, over-awed, in spite of himself, by Red Richard's manner.

"To be brief, then, I will wed the Lady Una out of hand; I will carry the Lady Irene to Dundalk, and there bestow her with one who shall love her dearly and cherish her royally."

Here Irene burst into a short, scornful laugh.

"As it hath never yet entered into the mind of mountain maid to dream of," proceeded Red Richard, calmly. "And for you, chieftain of Carn gall, I expect you to grace me with your daughter's dower, whereupon I pledge you my word—and I swear

by your daughter's lovely lips to keep my vow—you shall depart hence uninjured and instant. On the other hand, if you refuse to yield the gold, I will build me a fire in the castle kitchen, place you before it on a turning-spit, and sweat it out of you drop by drop! Now, what do you say?"

"That I scorn and loathe your proposals as yourself, wretch!" returned MacLaughlin, with unwise vehemence. "I refused your master—good God, must we now be insulted by his wretched underling?"

"Take care, by Mahound!" cried Red Richard, with a tigerish glare of his yellow eyes—"by the eternal devil, you shall reek for every word of that! I will win. 'Twas I who kidnapped Shiel O'Brasil, and brought him prisoner to Derry. Think you it was because he was Paulett's rival? No, because he was mine! I watched Paulett in the Lady Una's prison-chamber, and saved her from him in the very hour when he sought to make her his. Why?—Because I loved her, and knew that eventually she should be mine. To be sure I aided the Governor to go through the ceremony of a mock marriage with her; but it was only to compel you to give up the gold, which, had you yielded, he had never touched. I never meant him to possess her, or her dower. At the last moment I should have brought up his living wife from her dungeon-cell; I should have brought forward Muriel, my sister, also unlawfully wedded to him. I should have denounced, degraded, disgraced him. Then when he should have been cast into prison to expiate his crimes; then O'Brasil dead, and all rivalry at an end—then Una and the Constableness of Derry should both have been mine. But that night O'Doherty—God's curse on him—came on the scene, and baulked my plans. The Governor died that night like a dog, in Derry, and, by Mahound, he deserved it, for his rank stupidity and ranker cowardice. I walked off with a fair hoard of plunder. I am a captain now—a gay captain of cavalry—and no man can spur harder or strike heavier in his own service or the king's. When the fair Irene Magennis arrives in Dundalk, I shall that hour receive the accolade from my Lord Deputy. Then shall I be Sir Richard Corbett! What is my Lord Deputy but Sir Arthur Chichester? And, by Mahound, here stands his better man. Now, fair Una, what say you to being Lady Corbett?"

Una looked at him with wide, wild eyes, and wondered if the gates of heaven were shut, and if its ears were deaf.

Out through the thick walls of the old tower in which her room was situated—away out beyond the corridors and cloisters, the grim, arched passages, and sunless chambers of blue purbeck stone, she heard the wailing of the victims for whom no mercy came—the loud cries of the doomed, to whom the ear of heaven was stone—the death-rattle of the musketry!

MacLaughlin rose, looked at his two fair girls, and then at his persecutor.

“Richard Corbett,” he said, “I am an old man, and weak in body, but the spirit within me is as strong as your own. One thing only I will say—poor Fineen MacLaughlin’s ill-starred gold has brought much trouble to him, to me, and to my dear daughter, On one condition, and one only, will I part with it—namely, that in exchange for it you grant to my daughters and myself life and liberty, and instant passage from this place safe and uninjured.”

“You will agree to this, Captain Corbett,” pleaded Una, “you will be more merciful than Paulett?”

“And less man?—never! I will have my bride, and I will have her dower.”

“I will only say,” continued MacLaughlin, “that if any wrong or evil befall my dear children, never on earth shall you know where one piece of that golden hoard is secreted!”

“Oh, yes, I will!” cried Corbett, with grim confidence. “I tell you, you shall roar out where that gold is hidden when the fire begins to scorch you. You think ’tis Paulett’s question-room you have to face? Pish! he had not the ingenuity to devise a torture! Now, say, shall you divulge the secret and give up the gold, or shall I rather melt you into complaisance?”

“I have spoken.”

“And I have. Come!”

He seized the old man by the shoulder, and led him unresistingly across the room. But as they reached the door, Una sprang from her chair, and flung herself on her knees before Red Richard.

“Spare my father, Captain Corbett,” she pleaded, piteously. “Give us a little time—for mercy’s sake!”

“Say for your sake, fairest.”

“For my sake, for God’s sake, for any sake!”

"For yours only!" answered Red Richard, gazing straight down into the lovely violet eyes with a look in which Una read, at once, her power and her danger—"for your sake, I will give him and you one hour to consider, as you say, my proposal. At the end of that one hour, if he be wise, he shall pass out scathless from the castle gate; otherwise, he shall brook the question by fire, in such sort as he dreams not of. At the end of that time, I shall bring hither the old monk whom I saw with the recusants in the basecourt, and you and I shall be made one forthwith."

At either end of the dim, narrow, stone-arched corridor on which Una's chamber opened was a small, circular, turret-room, and to one of these Red Richard conducted MacLaughlin, to the other Irene, despite the reiterated prayers of the two girls that they might all be left for that one hour together.

Una heard the heavy doors clang to, one after another, and the keys grating in the massive locks. She looked at the glass on the mantelpiece. Already one quarter of its sand was run; and she had done nothing—thought of nothing! What should—what could she do?

As this burning question arose before her distracted mind, a step sounded in the passage without, the key turned in the lock, the door was flung open, and Red Richard entered.

He closed and locked the door behind him, and advanced hastily towards Una. The young girl's heart almost died within her; but she made an effort to gather her dignity and strength about her, and turned towards her dreaded enemy with a calm, questioning look.

The red intruder stopped short in his hasty advance. "I came to tell you," he began at last, "that the old monk is dead. Ridgeway found him an 'unprofitable;' he had nothing but his rosary, and so he was shot—therefore—we cannot—need not—be married now."

Una's heart gave a great leap within her, and the room began to swim round and round. But she grasped the back of a chair to preserve herself from falling, and answered steadily:—

"You come to tell me this, Captain Corbett? I thank you for that much generosity!"

"In what, fair Una?"

"In withdrawing your threat of an enforced marriage."

Red Richard laughed with a return of his old audacity.

"Sweetest, I only meant that the ceremony of marriage cannot or need not now be performed. There is no chaplain with Ridgeway's troops, and as I said your shorn-crown has been shot. But what imports it?"

"Enough!" said Una, preserving her outward calmness by a supreme effort. "You have told me that this detestable ceremony is not to be imposed on me; for that I thank you. Now leave me, sir."

"I shall not insist on the ceremony, but you shall be mine without it," returned Red Richard, suddenly striding forward, and attempting to take the fair girl in his arms.

Una sprang back, placing a table between her and her dreaded assailant.

"Is this how you keep your word, Captain Corbett?" she demanded, with haughty composure. "Did you not ask me to become your wife, and give me an hour to consider my answer? Will you be less just, less generous now than you were when you made that proposal?"

"No, by heaven, if I thought you would marry me," replied Red Richard, his huge frame trembling with passionate excitement, "If I believed you would, I would wait your sweet pleasure, though I died in waiting—I would wait—I would serve for you as Jacob served, twice seven years?"

"You promise much, Sir Captain, but perform little. You promised me an hour to think, and you have not granted one-fourth part of it."

He sprang across the table, and seized the fair girl's hands in his before she could prevent him.

"Una, I hold my heaven in my arms!"

Una's eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears, her lips began to quiver, her white throat to swell, her breast to heave convulsively. Wild terror and loathing took possession of her. Her mask of calm and brave composure would avail her but little longer. She turned to her savage suitor with a glance of sweet and wild appealing.

"Release me!" she faltered. "Oh, heaven! leave me!"

"Una!" he panted, hoarsely, "Una, say that you will wed me

at the hour's end, or by my soul and yours, I will not leave you !
Speak ! speak ! or I will forestall your answer."

"Come at the hour's end," she returned, once more, in steady tones.

"Shall I bring a priest ?"

"Yes, bring a priest."

"To wed us ?"

"To perform what rite you will."

He went out with unsteady step, closing the door behind him, but forgetting to lock it, and leaving the keys inside. Una listened to his clanking tread as he hurried away along the passage. Then came the regular tramp of the sentinel pacing to and fro. All else was still.

"Now, now, now," she murmured, turning from the door with an elevated almost a gay look. "Oh, God, for something now to cut the little slender thread that binds me to life—and infamy!"

As if in answer to her adjuration, her eye at that instant fell on a long, silken scarf of blue lying over the back of a chair. She stood there fixed and motionless for a few moments, looking straight before her with an entranced and steadfast gaze, as if some thrilling picture revealed itself before her mental eye that was not visible to the material sense.

"And I will be hanging there—dead—when he comes back," she whispered.

She climbed on the edge of the lofty bed and knelt there, casting the blue scarf into a running noose with deft and nimble fingers; all the while feeling a vague wonder that the dreadful feat was so easy—as easy as making a ribbon wreath for her wolf dog's neck.

Una looked once more at the hour-glass. Already three-quarters of its sands were run. She sprang up with a start, and flung one end of the silken sash over the crest of O'Doherty, surmounting the canopied bed-head. The fair girl knotted the shimmering scarf of blue and drew it lightly over the hand and sword of solid, glenwood oak. She raised her hands, and the azure loop fell about her snowy neck. Her eyes closed. She sprang from the bedside—but not into the empty air ! It was not the silken noose that tightened around her snowy neck, but a strong, supporting

arm that clasped her with a gentle pressure ! Her shut lily lids opened, like folded flowers, under a warm rain of kisses.

She looked up. She found herself encircled by O'Brasil's arms, she gazed wildly around. The silken scarf was swinging idly from the hand and sword. At the foot of the bed the heavy arras swelled in and out as if caught by the suspiration of some fitful breeze or draught. Then the arras was slowly raised, and a tall, weird, grey-shrouded figure passed into the room as noiselessly as a shadow.

"Shiel !" whispered Una, in a little, gasping breath—"Shiel, is this death or life ?"

"Life and love, mo mille gradh," returned O'Brasil. "What have they done to you, mo cailin ban ? Good God, have they injured you—my Una ?"

"No, oh, no ! But hush—sh—sh ! the sentinel is in the passage. Red Corbett has gone for a priest. He is coming to marry me at the hour's end, and I had determined to—die—and escape him."

"My poor, sweet love !"—raising her tenderly in his arms. "Come, Una, I am here to save you, though all else is lost. Grey Granu has brought me hither."

"But my father—Irene—oh, how can I leave them to their awful fate ? Oh, Shiel, my father is to be"—

"I know. Where are they ?"

"In the turret rooms."

"They are situated at either end of the passage on which this chamber opens," whispered Granu. "But the keys, maiden, what of them ?"

"I heard Red Corbett give them to the sentinel," answered Una. "Oh, Shiel"—with a quick, shuddering glance at the lessening sands in the hour-glass—"the time is nearly up."

"Granu," said O'Brasil, "take my love away. Away, my Una, fly ! I will save them, or die in the attempt."

"Oh, my selfishness !" wailed the fair girl—"It was not enough that you came here to save me, but I have thrust you now into this new peril ! Shiel, do not bid me go and leave you here to perish."

He stooped and kissed her once more, hastily.

"Fly, if you love me, Una ; away, or we shall be too late."

Grey Granu took the maiden's hand and led her away in silence.

She raised the arras at the part from which she had herself emerged, and drew her into a black and narrow aperture in the thick wall.

"Go down," she whispered, guiding her foot to a stone step, "down and down and down; keep on and fear not. Tread lightly; be silent as the grave. I must remain here to close the secret passage when your captain comes."

The Grey Woman released her arm, and, thus adjured, Una began the dark and winding descent, circling down and down into a void and dizzy darkness ending she knew not where. Grey Granu remained at the aperture.

O'Brasil had already crossed the chamber floor, turned the key with a sudden jerk, flung open the door, and leaped into the passage. The guard wheeled at the unexpected sound. He raised his musket, but before a note of alarm had time to issue from it O'Brasil's sword was through him, its encrimsoned point glittering six inches beyond his back. Snatching up the keys, he reached the door of MacLaughlin's room in a few flying strides. In a moment the key was turned in the lock, the narrow, pointed leaf thrown open.

In the farthest recess of the dim cell the old man was kneeling, absorbed in prayer, and as his young deliverer burst in upon him, and dragging him forth without a single word, swept him along the passage like a leaf in a whirlwind, and thrust him headlong into Una's room, where a shrouded and mystic figure took silent possession of him, the aged chief only bowed his venerable head and murmured, "God's will be done!" believing that he was on his way to the torture fires.

O'Brasil flew to Irene's cell, and inserted the key in the lock, but it refused to turn. As he laboured at the task with clenched teeth and panting breast, holding his sword in his left hand, still watching the low-browed Gothic doorway at the end of the passage, expecting every moment to see it darkened by the form of an enemy, heavy and hurrying steps rang out in the wide, cloistered hall from which the narrow passage leading to the ancient tower opened. There was the jingling of spurred heels, the clatter of steel scabbards, throwing resonant echoes along the vaulted roofs.

Just then the castle clock chimed out the hour. At the same

moment the voice of Red Richard was heard yelling, "There goes the time!—Lambert—Ridgeway—by Mahound, gentlemen, we are late for the wedding. Come on, Sir Priest!"

"My God, Irene—Rene Dun!" groaned O'Brasil, straining at the obstinate lock with all his strength.

The heavy steps were almost at the archway of the ancient passage. Crash! The wards of the key broke in the rusty lock, but fortunately the bolt was shot, and the door flew open to the wall.

"Quick!" whispered O'Brasil, "they are upon us!"

And they were; their footsteps sounded at the passage door as Irene glided from her prison cell.

O'Brasil raised her in his arms, and swung her over the bleeding body of the dead trooper into Una's chamber; and as he closed and locked the door, Red Richard could be heard, stumbling and blaspheming as he burst into the passage, dragging the priest along, and followed by those who came to witness his triumphant marriage with the lovely and far-famed Northern heiress.

Chapter 31.

PRIDE VERSUS LOVE.

It was night—a soft, grey, starlit night, dewy and sweet. High up on the hill-head the ghostly old Dun of Aileach stood, wrapped in a shroud of mist. Far below a deep fiord of Lough Swilly glinted grey in the cold starlight like a broad targe of steel. In a tiny creek overshadowed by heath-grown rocks a fisher-boat swung at anchor, with a man sitting in the stern-sheets, erect, alert, and watchful.

Those for whom the fisherman waited with so much eager impatience were at that moment assembled in Grey Granu's cave. They were Shiel O'Brasil, Bryan MacLaughlin, and his two fair girls.

After emerging from the subterraneous passage, which opened in a wood fully a mile from Burt Castle, the Grey Woman had conducted the fugitives to her cavern in Grianan Hill, where they had remained in waiting for the friendly cover of the night before attempting their final escape from the neighbourhood.

In their flight from the castle, they had chanced to meet one of O'Doherty's scouts on the mountain, who informed them that Sir Cahir had marched northward in all haste, on learning of the investment of Burt Castle, with the intention of relieving it. But the disastrous news of its capitulation had reached him when within a short day's march of the fortress; and disappointed in having received neither aid nor tidings from Nial Garv, the Chief-tain had withdrawn his forces to the other side of Lough Swilly, and encamped in the woods of Kilmacrenan, not far from Doe Castle.

It had only been necessary to procure a boat for the passage of Lough Swilly, a service which O'Doherty's scout had undertaken to perform, and all were assembled in the outer chamber of the Grey Woman's Cave, awaiting its advent with anxious hearts.

"Poor Sir Cahir I" sighed Una, "I trust we shall soon have an opportunity of seeing him once more, and offering him, at least, our sympathy in this hour of great misfortune."

"I mean to offer him something more substantial than my sympathy," said MacLaughlin. "Una, my child, we have more money than we shall ever want. To what better use could we apply it than to replenish our chieftain's war-chest in his hour of need?"

"Oh, dear father, let him have it all—all!" cried Una, enthusiastically. "Oh, why did we not think of this before?"

"I thought of it often, child, when lying a lingering invalid in Burt Castle. This is my first opportunity; besides, this is the Chieftain's first reverse, and therefore the most fitting time for the exercise of friendship."

Una's violet eyes as they unconsciously sought O'Brasil's thrilled the young man's soul with rapture. Bryan MacLaughlin caught the unwary glance, and he frowned heavily.

"Riches, indeed, you would not want, or peace or protection or home or household joys, had you accepted some one of the wealthy and distinguished suitors who sought your hand."

"Father," replied Una, softly, "I desire no better protection than yours; no station, no joy, higher or holier than sharing the perils and trials that surround you and our dear friends."

"Though, unfortunately, my dear child, your presence only increases them. For example, but for you—for us—this young man"—with a dubious glance at O'Brasil—"would have been far on his way to his chieftain's camp, instead of lingering here, at a time when every sword is wanted."

"The service on which I have been happily engaged is one that Sir Cahir will thank me for performing. Would to God I had been in time to rescue as well Lady O'Doherty and the wife of O'Hanlon."

"The fault was mine," said Grey Granu, "it was long, long since I had traversed the secret passage, and I had well nigh for-

gotten its intricacies. It was hours before I discovered its external opening in the wood; hours more ere I was able to unravel its various subterraneous closures; and so a day and a night had sped—the day of the capitulation the night succeeding it—before I was able to make an entry of Burt Castle.”

“I never before heard of the existence of such a passage,” said MacLaughlin, “and I am certain Sir Cahir did not know of it.”

“I am certain he did not,” returned the Grey Woman, laconically.

“Strange that Sir Cahir’s father did not make him acquainted with the secret of this important means of exit or escape.”

“He could not speak of what he did not know.”

“Stranger still that he did not know it. Yet, now that I think of it, the passage leads from the ancient wing which was erected by a family of O’Neills some two centuries before the building of the other portions of Burt Castle. Could it be that your ancestors were servants or retainers of O’Neill, and the tradition of the secret passage had been handed down from generation to generation?”

“You are ingenious, Chieftain, but quite at fault.”

“Perhaps our kind deliverer is an O’Neill herself,” put in Irene, gently.

“No,” said MacLaughlin, “the last of that ancient house was a woman, and one who brought shame and dishonour on her kin and race. She was very beautiful, but her name is a forgotten and a forbidden one.”

“What did she do?” demanded Grey Granu, in a hollow voice.

“Deserted her gallant husband, and fled with an English officer of evil repute. The officer was mysteriously slain shortly after; the outraged husband left the country and the wretched Finola and her child were never heard of more.”

While MacLaughlin spoke, O’Brasil’s penetrating eye was bent on the changing countenance of the Grey Woman—grey no longer! In the dim twilight of the sepulchral cave her pale face flamed like a brand; there came a look of inexpressible agony about her parted lips, and her blue eyes shone with a wild lustre.

“What was the name of—Finola’s husband?” inquired O’Brasil.

“Owen O’Malley, grandson of Grace O’Malley,” replied MacLaughlin, readily.

"And the English officer—what was his name?" pursued O'Brasil.

"The villain! I never heard it."

Grey Granu suddenly uttered a short, grating laugh, and O'Brasil who felt as if he had received a blow, wheeled round and walked hurriedly across the cavern and looked out through its dark portals into the night, seeing nothing but blackness.

Grey Granu led the way from her cave, and thence through the gorge on which it opened, down the hillside to the dim lough shore, walking a few paces in front, with her usual free, swinging rhythmic step. Bryan MacLaughlin, with his fair daughter on his arm, followed next, silent and stern-browed. O'Brasil and Irene brought up the rear, walking side by side in silence.

They soon reached the creek where the fisher-boat lay in waiting. MacLaughlin assisted his daughter down the slippery rocks, and seated himself beside her in the bows. O'Brasil handed Irene into the boat, and then turned to bid adieu to the strange woman who had saved his life, nursed him through sickness, aided him to rescue his love, and so zealously befriended him to the last.

"Farewell, Granu," he said, putting out his hand. "I will not forget what you have done for me. If I live, I will try to repay you. Before I leave you, say if there is aught in which I can serve you?"

"One thing only you can do. Swear to me that you will do it."

"It—it is nought contrary to right and honour?"

"No."

"Then I swear to you, by my hopes of heaven, that it shall be done, if in man's power to do it."

"Enough! Take this"—drawing a small packet, sealed with wax and tied with a ribbon, from beneath her cloak, and putting it into O'Brasil's hand. "Give it to the noble Spaniard at present with O'Doherty's army. How call ye him?"

"Don Eugenio Del Castillo."

"Give it to him; see that you put it into his own hand; and carry it safely for your love's sake—for your love's sake!—remember!"

"I will remember, Granu, for your own sake."

"Stoirin! astoirin! God be with you!"

The Grey Woman spread out her thin, white hands, benediction-

wise, over O'Brasil's dark head, as she uttered these words in her wildest, tenderest tones; and then, turning swiftly, she glided away, like a shadow, among the weed-tufted rocks, and was lost to view.

The fisherman, alert and active, had already stepped his mast and set his lug-sail, then casting off the painter, he shipped his oars and dipped them lightly in the shallow water, whistling softly for a wind.

O'Brasil leaped into the stern sheets and grasped the tiller.

"Give way," he whispered, "and God-speed."

Chapter 32.

IN THE CAMP AT KILMACRENNAN.

In the green woods of Kilmacrennan the early morning sun was shining brightly down into an open glade, bordered by ancient oaks and threaded by a silver stream. There, surrounded by a line of sentinels, and guarded on all sides by alert and watchful outposts, O'Doherty's little army was encamped on the morning of the 5th July. Cawbar O'Doherty, evidently fresh from culinary duties, burst into the presence of the chiefs with a manner and countenance of unusual excitement.

"Sir Cahir, they're here!" he panted, "they're coming. Dhia! here they are!"

"The Sassenach!" cried Sir Cahir, springing to his feet, his hand on his sword.

"The ladies!" cried Cawbar, "the gentle ladies from Burt Castle."

"Who is it?" interrupted Sir Cahir while he grasped his henchman's shoulder with a grip of unconscious force. "Whom have you seen? Speak!"

"My wife?" interjected O'Hanlon, with a glow of trembling eagerness in his dark eyes.

"I saw the Lady Irene Magennis, or her wraith, in the wood beyond, but I did not see the wife of O'Hanlon—no!"

Sir Cahir suddenly released his henchman's shoulder and glanced around with illumined eyes. O'Hanlon subsided into his place with a careless laugh—the mask in which pride and courage strove to hide an aching heart.

"Whom saw you besides?" demanded Phelim Reagh, anxiously—"my wife—my children?"

Poor M'Devitt did not know as yet that these had been found "unprofitables" by the bloody inquisitor of Burt Castle, and that wife or children he would see never more.

"I only saw the daughter of MacLaughlin, the MacLaughlin himself and"—

Here Bryan MacLaughlin entered the forest alley with his fair daughter on his arm. A few paces behind them, Irene and O'Brasil walked, side by side.

"Failte, Una ban!" O'Doherty cried, "and MacLaughlin, mille failte! the hap that brings you hither shows me that even the darkest pain may have a gleam of pleasure. Welcome, Rene Dun, welcome to our rude cheer and roofless dwelling"—playfully raising his hand towards the bending blue above them, but looking down into Irene's dark eyes with a whole summer shining in his own—"Aha! truant and laggard!"—to O'Brasil—"where have you been dallying these crucial days?"

"Where duty led me and misfortune kept me longer than I would," answered O'Brasil, "I trust, my chief, that when I have told you all, you will deem me guilty neither of neglect nor wilful dalliance."

"I think I may safely acquit you beforehand," said the young chieftain with a smile.

Sir Cahir then led the party forward, and they were instantly surrounded by a crowd of gentlemen eager alike to welcome and to question them.

When the scant and simple meal was over, and the numerous questions as to the fate and fortunes of friends and kindred at home replied to, as far as their knowledge extended, Sir Cahir conducted MacLaughlin, with Una and Irene, to a charming and secluded nook by the river's bank, where the clansmen had hastened to erect a bower of green boughs for their reception, and had already completed it, with all the magic speed of many ready hands and willing hearts.

Here MacLaughlin immediately mooted to Sir Cahir the important object of his visit to the camp; and the enthusiastic young chieftain and his aged vassal were soon deep in the price and importation of small arms and ordnance and the payment of soldiers. The thoughts of the two young girls, though from different reasons, were of too tumultuous a character to incline them to the patient listening to such dry details, deeply interested though they were in the grand result.

Una, making pretence of examining their sylvan retreat, but with her head and heart full of her brave young lover, had stolen away quietly. Knowing that she was to start for Doe Castle almost immediately, the few forbidden moments which she hoped to snatch with O'Brasil should she chance to meet him, would, she felt but too certain, be her last opportunity of speaking to him for heaven only knew how long.

A little later Irene also left the bower, and strolled down the river's bank in the direction taken by her foster-sister. Irene believed that her exit was unnoticed, but Sir Cahir never for a moment had been oblivious of her gracious presence. It was fully an hour afterwards, when all the preliminaries had been settled for the conveyance of a vast sum of money from MacLaughlin's secret treasury to the war-coffers of his youthful chief.

Sir Cahir arose from the log which had served him as a seat, and went off down the curving river bank, along which he had seen Irene taking her way. Among the shadows of the trees he caught the sheen of a pale, blue robe, and the flutter of a brown cloak and an eagle feather. But he passed on with a smile, not choosing to go, just then, in that direction. In a little, bowery hollow, enclosed by a deep curve of the river, he found Irene.

"Ah, Rene Dun," cried Sir Cahir, advancing with a smile, "how quickly you discovered this sylvan paradise, the existence of which I never even dreamt of!"

"And you have come to expel me from my Eden by reminding me that it is time to return to my father?" said Irene, rising with an answering smile.

"No, I have come to talk to you. The ungracious moment of expulsion will come soon enough."

"Perhaps my father will be looking for me," said Irene, hesitatingly.

"I think not; he knows that I have gone to seek you."

"But he may be anxious."

"Irene, are all your thoughts for him? He will have you long. I may have you again—never! I want to talk to you, and I want you to tell me of the—surrender—of Burt Castle."

Irene sat down at once, all her sympathies deeply stirred, all her fears vanishing—fears that were never for him, but for her own rebellious heart only.

Sir Cahir threw himself on the bank before her, where he could see her face as she talked.

"Now begin," he said; but without giving her time to comply with his imperative request, he continued, looking up and smiling into her dark eyes with boyish lightness:

"How delightful it is to lie here once more, as in the old days long ago! Rene, I can almost believe them back again."

"But you forget that I am to tell you of Burt Castle."

"Oh, I have heard it all," he said, bitterly. "One thing only I wish to ask you. Had you been the lady and mistress of that stately hold, what would you have done when the English enemy knocked at your castle gate? Answer me, Irene, what would you have done?"

"What can it matter what I would have done?" said Irene, looking aside to avoid his gaze. "And I cannot tell you what I would have done."

"Rene dhas, I know what you would not have done."

"How can you when I do not know myself."

"You would not have set the gates wide open to admit the ravening wolf-pack into the defenceless fold."

"Sir Cahir, it is easy to be wise and brave untried."

"Perhaps," he said, with a smile that brought the rich colour to Irene's cheek, "I can tell you what you would have done," he continued, looking at her with glowing eyes, "you would have held the castle against Ridgeway's butchers until its strong towers had tumbled to their base, or you would have held it until succour came."

For one moment Irene's dark eyes met his; for one moment his burning glance held hers, and in that moment the secret of her life passed for ever out of her heart to his.

"Rene—my Rene dhas!" he cried, clasping his arms around

her and gathering her to his heart. "Oh, my love—my lost, dear love!"

With a cry that mingled the very madness of pain, love, despair, Irene burst from him and fled—fled wildly, swiftly, knowing nothing of whither she went until, breathless and exhausted, she flung herself, face downwards, on the grass, under the shadows of a deep tangle of brushwood, and lay there, sobbing as if her heart would break and every quivering chord of life would be rent and torn asunder.

She told herself that she did not wish it, that it was a crowning misfortune, a sorrow of sorrows, involving his happiness in the same deep ruin with her own. She wept for it, and for him, wildly, yet oh, so tenderly! She asked herself with fierce scorn, with sternest self-reproach, what she had done to draw to herself the love that was pledged to another.

How long she had lain there, tossed by her wild emotions, before she was calm enough to notice external things, she did not know, when the clear note of a bugle whose tones she well knew came winding to her ear. She heard the distant trampling of feet and clanking of arms, and presently voices calling her name in startled accents.

She sprang to her feet and ran towards the camp with speed, flinging back her dishevelled hair, and wiping the tears from her pale cheeks as she went.

"I am here! I am here!" she called; and the next moment, emerging on the river's bank, she was confronted by Una and her father, together with three tall MacLaughlins, leading as many horses, ready caparisoned.

"Where have you been, my child?" cried the old man. "Good heavens, how pale you look?"

"My—my head ached," faltered Irene, turning crimson, "and I stayed to"—

"But do you know that the clansmen are just about to march? Gilla-na-bo has brought us word that Wingfield is advancing towards Kilmacrenan with his whole strength, fully two thousand men, and Sir Cahir means to give him battle there."

"My God!" murmured Irene, half aloud, "and this is Tuesday—the lucky day for the English, the fatal day for the O'Doherty's!"

"And we, I suppose," said Una, tremulously, "are to part with—our people—here, and journey direct to Doe?"

"Not so. We have judged it better to await the issue of this battle. Wingfield is concentrating all his forces on Doe Castle; the English gunboats are in Sheephaven Bay, and if we lose this action, which heaven forbid! a fortress in the throes of war would not be the best place for my daughters' refuge. Besides, the treasure we have promised to O'Doherty I would fain deliver to him at once, as soon, in fact, as the fight is ended."

"We shall then remain with the clansmen until the action is over?" said Irene, her eyes shining with a strange, deep lustre.

Chapter 33.

THE HARVEST OF DEATH.

It still wanted some two hours of midday when O'Doherty crossed a ford of the swift and rushing Lannan, and marched past the ancient Abbey of Kilmacrenan. O'Doherty advanced some distance further and took up his position in a slight screen of wood on the edge of a tract of bog-land which defended his front from cavalry and cannon, in the former of which, thanks to the treachery of Nial Garv, he was all but wanting, in the latter wholly so.

His rear rested on a heath-clad slope, above which towered the storied Rock of Doon. Under the rocky fort, on its eastern side, opened a small cavern, and this cave MacLaughlin selected as a temporary refuge and resting-place for Una and Irene.

Meanwhile, O'Doherty, with a number of his chief gentlemen, climbed the rock above, which afforded a commanding view of the country far and near. But as yet no glimpse of the approaching enemy was visible down the rolling valley. The woods and hills that everywhere bounded the circle of vision concealed him as yet from sight.

"I would thou hadst not fought to-day," murmured MacLaughlin, abstractedly, "'tis Tuesday, the unlucky day, and oh, my son, my chief ! the knell was heard last night !"

"What ?" cried Phelim Reagh, with a violent start and anxious glance at Sir Cahir—"Did I hear you say—the knell !—was rung last night ?"

"What am I saying?" faltered the old man, meeting the re-proving eye of O'Doherty, and conscious that he had made a grave mistake. "What we heard may have been the—the"—

"Seamews crying," said Sir Cahir, with a laugh. "I heard them myself startling the echoes from midnight until morning. The angry birds know that an English hoy is in our waters."

As the young warrior spoke he took MacLaughlin's arm and led him to the edge of the rock.

"Chieftain of Carn gall," he said in a low tone of displeasure, "these old-fashioned omens have no business on a battle-field, unless they be forecasts of victory. The prophets at the Yellow Ford knew better. The spaemen at Kinsale fortold disaster; and disaster came."

"And think you such augers are but idle breath?" demanded the old chieftain, half angrily. "Have you, yourself, no faith in those old observances?"

"Faith!" cried the young man, with shining eyes. "I have no fear! I have given myself to God and Ireland. Are they not worthy caretakers? I will fight for them until my last breath. When that comes, the earth will give me a grave."

As Sir Cahir ceased speaking to MacLaughlin, Shiel O'Brasil was seen galloping across the plain towards the rock.

"The enemy!" he cried, as soon as he was within hail. "They have halted in the timber at the opposite side of the bog!"

Sir Cahir's little army, if army it might be called, weakened by the fatal treason of Nial Garv, and reduced by months of constant and harassing, though victorious warfare, numbered in all not over a thousand men. Wingfield's troops, with the contingent from Burt Castle headed by Ridgeway and Lambert, who had joined him after a rapid march, counted fully twice—according to some authorities, three times—that number.

The position chosen by O'Doherty, however, was in his favour, as Wingfield's squadron of horse, heavy cuirassiers, well mounted and well armed, could not be brought into action.

O'Doherty drew out a skirmishing party of fifty musketeers, together with a hundred light-armed kerne of O'Hanlon's country equipped with javelins and straight-bladed swords, and carrying round targets on their left arms. These, with O'Brasil's dismounted troop of light horse, accoutred with swords and spears,

deployed along the bog-side in open order, while his pikemen and gallowglasses, held in reserve, were posted in the wood and on the heath-clad slope under the Rock of Doon.

Wingfield's cavalry, a long line of polished cuirasses and steel caps, could be seen glittering along the farther bound of the wet bog; they made no attempt at a nearer approach. His infantry were also drawn up in full view; but for half an hour the grim old Marshal contented himself with looking across the bog at his youthful adversary.

If the wily General counted on the impetuous valour of his youthful foe to draw him from his secure position, he was doomed to disappointment. At length, however, he threw out three hundred musketeers to engage the Irish.

The English column marched steadily across the morass, which grew wet and wetter at every step; still they kept on persistently, though sinking ankle deep in the black mire at every stride. Sir Cahir's light-stepping kerne moved forward a little way to meet them, and then halting waited for their advance. Motionless they stood, while, at the various words of command, the musketeers handled their muskets, planted their rests, levelled their pieces. But when at the word "Fire!" a volley crashed from three hundred levelled tubes, the storm of death passed harmlessly over the heads of Sir Cahir's skirmishers. At a preconcerted signal from their young commander they had thrown themselves flat on the earth, and escaped the leaden hail.

"Forward," shouted Sir Cahir, then, springing to his feet and waving his sword, "upon them spear and skene!"

"O'Doherty aboo!" yelled the clansmen, and grasping their weapons they rushed on the foe through the dun smoke of their volley. Sir Cahir's fifty shot told at point blank distance. The musketeers reeled, wavered, broke, and fled; while the Irish, pursuing them, covered the wide waste with the first red fruits of victory.

Sir Cahir's bugle sounded the retire before his impetuous kerne had advanced too far; and while Wingfield's shattered ranks reformed sullenly beyond the bog.

Again Wingfield's musketeers advanced to the attack. They were reinforced to double their former strength, and supported by a body of five hundred halberdiers, while the cavalry formed

as close as possible to the marches of the bog, prepared to bring off the foot if they suffered a second repulse.

Sir Cahir saw that it would require his whole strength to meet this determined onslaught. He again threw forward his fifty shot, and ordered O'Brasil and O'Hanlon with their light companies to take up their position behind a natural ridge in the bog which defended them like a breast-work, and there await the enemy's advance.

O'Doherty himself led the pikemen and gallowglasses; while Don Eugenio, who had no command, carried his Toledo by the chieftain's side.

O'Brasil and O'Hanlon led forward their light companies, and, with the fifty muskets, took up their position behind the ridge. The pikemen and gallowglasses followed at some distance, but not too far off to afford support.

On came Wingfield's troops, the musketeers headed by Lambert, the halberdiers by Ridgeway. Determined this time not to waste their lead, the musketeers reserved their fire until they had gained the top of the ridge that sheltered the Irish kerne. Then with a hoarse cheer they planted their rests, prepared to sweep the crowded hollow with a deadly fusilade.

At that instant O'Hanlon gave the word to fire, and the fifty Irish shot, whose forks were ready planted and pieces levelled, discharged a telling volley into the close ranks of the enemy. Simultaneously the spears and javelins of the light companies hissed through the air, crashing through casque and corslet.

"O'Doherty aboo!" shouted O'Brasil, springing to the summit of the ridge at the head of his men. "Upon them, sword and skene!"

The English musketeers discharged an irregular and random volley, but already the fierce kerne of Innishowen and Orior were at their throats, and once more the musketeers began to stagger.

"Forward, halberdiers—charge!" yelled Ridgeway, furiously.

On came the solid column of halberdiers, plunging heavily, in heavy armour, through the wet morass, yet struggling stubbornly on, their weapons at the charge.

"Yonder come Ridgeway's murderers!" shouted Sir Cahir, his blue eyes gleaming like his Spanish blade as he pointed towards them. "On, on, my true men—give them the pike and tuagh!"

Forward went the pikemen and gallowglasses with a rushing charge and a wild "Aboo !" hurling themselves headlong on the levelled weapons of their foes.

It was now point to point and man to man; the Irish pike against the English halberd, axe and tuagh against musket butt and skian fada.

The musketeers had rallied and again stood firm. Neither side had any thought of yielding, and the fight was bloody and determined. Gradually the English column began to waver; they gave ground step by step, leaving their dead behind them, strewn and trampled in the splashing swamp.

At that moment, Macaulay Mor, as he brought down his two-edged tuagh in a last deadly sweep, fell, pierced by a bullet through his gallant heart. The green flag, with its hand and cross, wavered for a moment in the upper air, as if loth to furl its proud pinions and descend from its lofty flight; then it came soaring down, with outspreading folds, and settled gently over the dead giant's breast.

Sir Cahir's men did not notice the fallen flag, but its descent was marked by the enemy, and greeted by an exultant cheer that gave new courage to their failing hearts.

But before Sir Cahir's men had become aware of their loss, the standard was lifted from the dead giant's breast and borne steadily onward once more.

It did not rise so high or flaunt so far as when waved by the iron hand of Macaulay Mor, for the new ensign was a slight and slender figure—a figure deeply draped in a woodkerne's cloak and hood—but still the flag went steadily forward through the battle's press until it shone like an ægis above Sir Cahir's head.

O'Doherty pressed on his foes with increasing impetuosity, fighting as if his single arm might have won the field. Presently he espied an officer on foot in the bog, clad cap-a-pie in steel armour. He raised his visor and glared over the field with wrathful and despairing eyes.

"Ridgeway !" cried Sir Cahir, grasping his sword with a fierce clutch, "down with the butcher of Burt Castle !"

Ridgeway heard the cry and turned towards O'Doherty with a scowling brow.

"Coward and murderer—stand, by heaven !" shouted Sir Cahir,

as forgetting everything but vengeance, he struggled madly towards him through the press, "murderer of women and babes."

But Ridgeway deliberately retreated before the furious onset of O'Doherty, while he called to his men in stentorian tones:

"Rally, rally, my stout halberdiers—a thousand marks to the man who cuts off the traitor's head!"

"Follow me, my true men. Close up like a wedge. Down, down on the murderers," shouted Sir Cahir, springing forward with resistless strength.

O'Brasil, face to face with a gigantic halberdier, and weakened by recent illness, strove to keep by his side in vain. Lunging within, O'Brasil made a furious cut at his assailant which ought to have brought him to the ground; but his blade glanced off the soldier's breastpiece, inflicting no injury. In recovering his guard, O'Brasil's foot slipped in the slimy bog, and he fell backward, his head striking violently against the iron casque of a dead halberdier. His antagonist who, at the same instant, had aimed a death thrust at his heart, went down above him, carried forward by the impetus of the blow, and the tide of fight rushed over the prostrate bodies of the two combatants, the insensible Irishman below, the giant Englishman above, trampling down both in the bloody mire.

At the same moment O'Doherty, whose impetuous valour had outstripped the boldest, found that he had advanced too far. The English halberdiers closed around him; a score of points were at his breast at once.

O'Hanlon was fighting his way towards him with a reckless bravery that mocked at danger. Don Eugenio could not reach him, though his terrible Toledo dealt death on every side.

"Rescue! rescue your chief!" shouted the grey-cloaked ensign.

Yelling their war-cry, with a mad resistless rush the clansmen leaped forward, hurling themselves headlong on the enemy, pike and axe, sword and skene.

The halberdiers, who had rallied for a time at their commander's call, gave way before this desperate onset, and despite the rallying voice and sword of Ridgeway, fled in utter rout and confusion across the bog.

The Irish chased the flying enemy almost to the confines of the bog, and until they were near enough to receive a volley from Wingfield's troopers. Then they retired, wondering why the

chieftain's bugle had not sooner called them back, for Sir Cahir was ever as sparing of his clansmen's lives as he was prodigal of his own.

They looked around for Sir Cahir's lofty form, for the wave of the dusky plume and the flash of the keen blade that had led them on to victory.

They looked, but looked in vain.

Where is the chief?" cried O'Hanlon, as he leaned for a moment, panting, on his crimson blade, and drew his left hand across his eyes to clear them from blood and sweat.

Chapter 34.

DEATH OF O'DOHERTY.

At the moment the ensign's clear voice, soaring above the din of strife, reached Sir Cahir's ear, with its strenuous call of "Rescue the chief!" his sword seemed to pause for an instant in its death-dealing sweep, he turned with a glance, quick as a flash of light on the slender, grey-clad form straining towards him through the battle press.

In that fatal instant the English steel closed around him, and in that instant, as his clansmen, sprang to his rescue with resistless rush, the chieftain fell. The young standard-bearer had seen it all, and as the victorious clansmen swept on, he sprang forward with a heart-broken cry and fell, face downward, ere he could reach the chieftain's side.

Father Edmond, who was mournfully busy on the field of strife, came presently towards the ghastly heap of dead and dying forms. He had seen Sir Cahir's dusky plume tossed like a war cloud in that last charge, and then—he had seen it not.

Now he perceived it again; the broad beaver lay at his feet, the heron's wing stained with a gout of blood. A few hurried steps, and he came on the motionless form of O'Doherty. The dying warrior's last humble confession was soon made, and his soul fortified by the last solemn rites of Holy Church. When the sacred ceremony was concluded, he raised his eyes to the face of his sorrowful confessor with a grateful look, and then inquired, eagerly:

"Father Edmond, how goes the fight?"

"We have again chased the Sassenach off the field," answered the Franciscan, "we have won the day—and lost our all!" he added, looking down mournfully into the dying face, and perhaps hardly realising the bitter and terrible truth of his closing words.

"Father Edmond!"

"Speak, my son?"

"Where is the Lady Irene Magennis?"

"She left the Rock of Doon and came down to the field with me—she and the Lady Una. They were tending the dying, binding up wounds of friends and foes, and doing all that such gentle and heroic hearts could do."

"Where is Irene now?"

"I know not, and"—gazing around—"I cannot see far for the battle smoke. When I saw her last she was making a pillow with a woodkerne's cloak to support some dying head."

"Would she were here now to support mine. Father Edmond, go and find her!"

The good Franciscan rose from his knees, and hurried away over the smoke-wreathed waste in the direction where he had last seen Irene. Meanwhile, the dying chief called the name of Irene, though his voice was too low and faint to have reached any mortal ear.

"Irene!" he breathed, and a look of wistful, infinite yearning came into his pale countenance—"Irene, Irene, come to me!"

The slender form of the grey-clad standard-bearer, lying within a few feet of him, motionless, insensible, and by him unseen, suddenly quivered all over with a thrill of returning life. It was as if that dying call had reached his soul, if not his ear.

He sprang to his feet, staggered forward, and threw himself on his knees by the chieftain's side, bending down over him with a wild, white face and eyes as dark as death.

The lovely face, the eyes of unfathomed woe that looked out from the enshrouding folds of the woodkerne's mantle were the face, the eyes of Irene Magennis.

"I am here—I am here!" she cried. "Oh, Cahir, my chief and lord!—My God, he is dead!—my love—my love is dead!"

She raised his head to her bosom, wildly kissing the pale, still face in a transport of love and agony.

Sir Cahir's deep blue eyes opened once again, and as their failing gaze rested on the beautiful face bending over him they filled with a sudden glow of life and rapture.

"My Rene dun!" he murmured, happily, "you did love me then?"

The wide, blue eyes smiled into hers with a last, tender, lingering light, and then—light and love and life went out forever.

The chief was dead!

Irene Magennis sprang to her feet with a long, wailing cry; but the next instant fell forward to the earth, with the grey cloak enshrouding her, as motionless as the dead warrior beside whom she lay.

Father Edmond, in his anxious quest for Irene Magennis, met the returning clansmen on the bog.

"Have you seen the chief?" demanded a score of voices.

"To my sorrow, yes. He has fallen; he is dying—I fear, ere this."

"Dying?" echoed O'Hanlon. "What, Dhia agus Maire! is there no hope?"

"None!"

When Father Edmond's words fell on the clansmen's ears, the effect was terrible; the martial spirit suddenly died out of their hearts, and the blackness of grief and despair swept down upon them and overwhelmed them.

The caione rang far and near over the dark bogland; with its silent dead, the woods, the grey walls of Kilmacrenan, calling out from each a live tongue of lamentation, loss, despair, unending!

It was a sound that told its own story. It told it to others besides the stricken mourners.

Wingfield was retiring with his army beyond the borders of the bog, when this ear-piercing caione suddenly smote the air. He had lived long enough in Ireland to know well its import.

The English generals, aided by the eagle eyes and sharp wits of Red Dick Corbett, were not long in reading the open secret, and while Father Edmond was still leading O'Hanlon and the others towards the spot where Sir Cahir lay, the squadron of cuirassiers dismounted, and led by Red Richard at the head of his troop, dashed into the bog with sabres drawn.

Wingfield himself also pushed into the bog on foot, with the

entire remnant of his army, squeaking his orders with malignant ferocity, to slay the wounded, to give no quarter.

"Five thousand merks for the traitor's head!" piped Wingfield in his shrillest key, and forward went the vanguard with a thunderous cheer.

Out on the black bog a sorrowful group was now gathered around the body of their dead chief, blind to all things but their heavy sorrow, their heavy loss.

That exultant yell startled them from their brief trance of forgetfulness.

Phelim Reagh hastily drew a cloak over the dead chieftain's face and ordered half a dozen kerne to carry away the body to the abbey of Kilmacrenan.

"Rally, rally, men of the North," shouted O'Hanlon, then, "close up, Clan-Doherty, and avenge your chief!"

The Tanist of Orior sprang forward, waving his sword with undaunted courage; but the clansmen rallied slowly, or rallied not at all. Their eyes, their hearts were with the mournful cortege moving across the bog—there they saw death and ruin.

O'Hanlon, M'Devitt, the Spaniard, and a handful of dauntless spirits, continued to fight their way backward, step by step, against overwhelming odds, still interposing one clump of desperate blades between the enemy and the body of their chief, until within the fringe of wood on the confines of the marshy plain the clansmen bearing the body of O'Doherty were overtaken. There the last stand was made.

The clansmen who carried the body of O'Doherty drew their spears, and facing the foe, fell one by one around their dead chief. Phelim Reagh then bestrode the body of his chief and foster-son, fighting like a lion at bay, until covered with wounds, and red with his own blood and that of his enemies, he fell backward into the arms of O'Hanlon, who by the aid of Don Eugenio, carried him off the field, the enemy suffering them to retire through the wood unpursued.

Corbett, fighting in the front rank, had seen a sight that was in itself amply sufficient to stay his onward course, even had he been inclined to press further on such desperate valour.

"Cheer, my men!" shouted Red Richard. "Your captain has won the five thousand merks! Take up the traitor's body and

carry it to the marshal at the head of the troop."

The troopers obeyed cheering with savage jubilation.

Midway across the bog, as he returned in triumph, Red Richard's eye was arrested by a figure crouching behind the hulking body of a dead halberdier. A glance was sufficient to show him that the figure, though at some distance across the bog, was that of the lovely daughter of MacLaughlin.

"Una!" he exclaimed, with a mighty oath, starting towards her in a perfect tempest of fierce exultation. "Ye gods, now is my triumph crowned!"

With a wild cry the fair girl sprang to her feet and rushed away, her lightsome speed outstripping that of her red pursuer, floundering in his heavy armour through the yielding swamp.

On, on she went, at every step distancing her enemy. But, alas! the race was of short duration. Presently Una's foot caught in the loose folds of a woodkern's mantle; the flying maiden staggered forward a few steps, dragging the entangling cloak, in a supreme effort to free and recover herself, and, at the same instant, exposing to view that which the cloak had hitherto enshrouded and concealed—the fair form of Irene Magennis, lying cold and motionless on the bloody field.

Una saw, shrieked, and fell.

The next moment the lovely fugitive and her foster-sister were once more in Red Richard's grasp.

Wingfield instantly despatched a courier to the Deputy bearing the tidings of the day's event. Red Richard added half a dozen words to the message on his own account. Then the Marshal hastily collected his wounded, and without waiting to bury his dead, set forth in hot haste for Derry at the head of his squadron of horse, with drums beating, trumpets sounding, and colours flying, and with the dead chieftain carried before him in a horse litter.

Chapter 35.

A FIELD OF THE DEAD—THE CAPTIVE MAIDENS.

Wingfield's troopers were hardly out of sight of the field of strife when the dead halberdier behind whose herculean form Una MacLaughlin had been crouching began to move convulsively. The stark body rose and fell, the stiffened limbs were flung about as if seized by some strange contortion. At last the huge trunk was heaved up and rolled over; and a few seconds later the form of Shiel O'Brasil rose slowly from the bloody mire in which it had been embedded—pressed deeply down into the yielding bog by the violence of his fall and the overlying weight of the dead Titan. O'Brasil felt benumbed and stiff, his brain was bewildered; his eyes swam; his head ached from the violent concussion of the steel casque, that had deprived him of consciousness.

He looked around him in dire alarm. Away over the shoulder of a woodclad hill he espied the rear guard of Wingfield's army retiring at a rapid march.

O'Brasil turned hastily from the dismal bog and traversed the fringe of wood, mournfully advised at every step that the rout of his brave comrades had passed that way, until at the Abbey of Kilmacrenan an aged monk crept out from a hiding-place and assured him of the bitter truth; adding the doleful news that the chief was slain, and that MacLaughlin had lost both his fair daughters on the fatal field, supposing them to be captives in the hands of the enemy.

The young captain of horse, his heart bursting with sorrow for his gallant chief, and torn with a thousand fears and anxieties for the fate of his gentle love and her foster-sister, instantly retraced his steps on receipt of this intelligence.

He took possession of a straying steed in the wood, stuck his girdle full of pistols, which he had no difficulty in picking up on the place of combat, and set forth at speed in the direction taken by the enemy, having little doubt that both the girls had fallen once more into their ruthless hands. He traversed the shore of Lough Swilly, hanging on the enemy's rear, anxious to keep a safe distance, yet running imminent risk of encounter with parties of stragglers bent on plunder and depredation, and loitering far behind.

So slow was his progress on this account, that it was after midnight when the adventurous rider reached the shores of the Foyle. While he stood by the roadside within the fringe of trees, a tall, supple figure suddenly glided out from the deeper shadows of the wood and stood before him in the moonlight.

"What, Gilla-na-bo!" exclaimed O'Brasil, in tones of mingled pleasure and surprise.

"The same," answered Gilla.

"What news?" inquired O'Brasil, eagerly, "have you seen the Lady Una or the Lady Irene? What of Don Eugenio, O'Hanlon and the rest?"

"I can answer all your questions, but turn your horse's head and come this way, we can travel while we talk."

"But, man, I am in quest of MacLaughlin's daughters."

"And I am in pursuit of them. Now, turn your horse."

"To begin with, the body of our chief was set up four hours ago, in four quarters, on the four gates of Derry. The ladies were taken by Red Richard on the field, carried to Derry, and when the devil's work was over there, and when the red miscreant had refreshed and rested, he started southward on the spur for Dundalk, doubtless taking the two ladies with him."

Red Dick Corbett, at the head of his troop, pursued his way along the road to Dundalk at a rapid rate. He bestrode a powerful charger, and carried a black casket behind him strapped to his saddle, for the security of which, judging from his frequent

backward glances, he seemed nearly as solicitous as for that of his fair captives.

Una and Irene rode in the centre of the cavalcade, each with a trooper before her, to whose waist her hands were fastened by a scarf.

Irene Magennis had been restored from her death-like swoon by the untiring exertions of her foster-sister. But though life had returned, her mind had not recovered from the shock caused by the death of O'Doherty; and as her captors bore her onward through the summer night, she seemed no longer conscious of the part she was made to play in the drama of events.

As they dashed onward along the silent road the night became gradually overcast; great masses of black clouds rolled up from the south and cast a livid gloom over earth and sky. At last a blinding flash of lightning quivered from their inky depths. A deafening thunder peal instantly followed the flash, causing the startled horses to swerve and quiver with terror. A few great drops of rain splashed heavily down, and then all at once the flood-gates of the skies opened and the rain came down in sheets and streams.

"The devil!" growled Red Richard, "we must seek shelter somewhere; but for this infernal hurly we should have made ten miles further without drawing rein."

"Is there any refuge ahead?" inquired the trooper who rode next him, in alarmed and anxious tones.

"None for miles, save an old, ruined tower which is just before us."

Headed by their captain, the troopers dashed across a wide basecourt, strewn with fallen masonry, and rode through a doorless door-way right into what was once the great hall of a castle.

Some beams and rafters were soon found in a ruinous apartment adjoining the great hall; these were speedily piled on the hearth, and a bright fire was soon leaping up the cavernous chimney.

The troopers unsaddled their horses, and fastened them by their bridles to some iron pins in the wall, that had once supported spoils of the chase, or trophies of arms; and then crowded around the fire, shaking out their drenched habiliments before the blaze;

while Red Richard, turning to Una and Irene, untied their hands and assisted them to alight.

Una shrank away from him, shuddering at his touch; but Irene permitted him to lift her from her horse without the shadow of a shade of change in eye or feature, seeming utterly unconscious of his presence, and of her awful and strange surroundings.

"Come, lady birds, and dry your plumage," said Red Richard, jauntily, as he drew his two fair prisoners towards the fire. He placed Irene on a pile of rafters at one side of the hearth, then seated himself on a huge oaken beam before the fire, and seizing Una, drew her down by his side.

"Come, light o' love," he said. "I had meant to provide you with cosier quarters, but what is meat for the master must be meat for his mate."

He put his arm around Una's waist with insolent possessiveness. The fair girl shrank away from him with a flash of anger and loathing; but her red captor held her with his rude strength, and she could not stir.

"I would I had something to eat and drink," growled a tall trooper, discontentedly; "a man who has not love to sup on should have bread and beer."

"Thou art more likely to sup with the devil on red hot coals," rejoined another, "Oons! there was a blaze!—what a crash!—Uds bones, are we going to have company?"

As the trooper gave vent to these disjointed exclamations, the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and the broad blaze of electric fire that lit up the basecourt at the same instant showed a glimpse of two equestrians urging their cattle with whip and spur towards the open door of the tower.

In another second the voices of the horsemen could be heard outside the portal, begging admittance from the guard.

"Gie us a share o' the roof that covers you, in God's name, gallant sodger," said the foremost of the newcomers, in a strange medley of Scotch and Irish! "Dhia agus Maire, what a flood o' fire! Ewow an', it be the day o' judgment, een let us in tae get a drap o' warm stuff tae pit out the fear. I hae the stingo on the bit garran's back, let us in and I'll no' refuse a king's man a wee drappie tae dry his doublet, and pay my lodging."

Red Dick sprang to his feet, strode across the hall, looked out

for an instant at the new-comers, and, "In with you," he cried, "in ! in ! before the rain has washed off your Scotch, which seems to sit on you somewhat lightly."

"Scotch bluid disna mix well wi' water, captain, but there's naething warms it like a drap Irish usquebagh," returned the foremost horseman, as, availing himself of the accorded permission, he guided his dripping beast through the doorway closely followed by his fellow-traveller.

A couple of good-sized jars were slung by a leathern strap across his horse's back, and a greasy wallet was placed behind the saddle. Red Dick scanned the new-comers narrowly as they advanced into the glinting firelight.

"Who are you, and whither bound ?" he inquired, sharply

"I'm a pedlar," answered he of the pack, in rasping Gaelic, "bound any place where yards of taffety and ells of ribbon may be turned into rose-nobles and silver crowns. This honest Scot overtook me on the road, and I hold mysel' in double luck to have fallen twice into such good company."

"Step forward and share the fire, then, if thou'rt an honest man," said Corbett, "but an thou art a rogue or a traitor, I warn thee, thou hadst better have put thy head into a wolf's mouth as under the roof that shelters Red Dick Corbett. Step up to the fire, and in the morning you can show your daintiest wares to these fair dames."

The pedlar turned to his pack and Red Richard to the swarthy Scot.

"Who are you, Puckerface ?" he demanded, bending his yellow eyes on him with keenest scrutiny.

"Manaan, if I'm no' an honest Scot my name's no' M'Liquor," answered the man, in the same hap-hazard jumble of Scotch and Gaelic, "though frae lang residence amang the wild Irish their lingo dings aff my tongue like ern aff a happer. As for my business, I'm on my way to the Red Fox, wi' these twa jars o' prime usquebagh for the jolly host."

"Good ! uncork your jars, fellow, and let us try your nectar."

M'Liquor lifted the jars carefully from the horse's back, placed them on the floor and drew the corks.

"I made it mysel', and I can staun owre it," he remarked, bending over the jars and sniffing them with intense satisfaction.

Red Dick stepped forward and took off his casque. He seized one of the jars, poured out a liberal quantity of its contents and quaffed it at a long draught.

"Now, fellows, come hither with yer iron pots," he cried.

The troopers crowded around their captain, their faces beaming with gratification, while doffing their helmets and holding them forth, and Red Dick, who was never stingy with another's goods, dealt out a generous measure to each man. The men received each a second allowance, as liberal as the first; the sentinel on duty at the door was relieved, and he also obtained his share; the guard was doubled, and the troopers, wrapping their cloaks around them, laid themselves down to rest without more ado.

All were now disposed for sleep, save Irene, Una, and Red Richard. The former with her hands linked loosely in her lap still sat motionless on the pile of wood, seeing, hearing nothing.

Una painfully awake to all that was going on around her, still stood before the fire, mechanically shaking out the folds of her garments, long since dry, and dreading that the usquebagh, in which her ferocious captor was indulging, would provoke some new insult or outrage at his hands.

In this her fears soon proved but too well-founded.

Red Dick, who had previously drained M'Liquor's jar, in helping himself to a third supply, walked towards the fire, seated himself on the oaken beam, seized Una, and drew her down by his side once more. His face, as he turned it towards the terrified maiden, was darkly flushed, his yellow eyes glaring; his casque, which he carried in his hand, still contained a portion of the fiery fluid.

"Drink, my love," he said, presenting the helmet to Una's lovely lip, "come, drink—nay, but you must! a soldier's sweet-heart need not be too coy to kiss the cup her soldier drinks from."

"Wretch!" panted Una, pushing away the casque and struggling in the villain's grasp.

The pedlar, lying back in the shadows on the stone floor, made a sudden attempt to get on his feet; but M'Liquor, who seemed of opinion that discretion was the better part, pulled him down with a resolute grip.

At the same moment, with a wild laugh, Red Richard raised the helmet to his lips and drained it of its contents.

"Thus, then," he exclaimed, "it needed but that last drop to raise the devil!"

He flung his arms around Una's waist, and clasped the maiden, now wildly shrieking, to his breast.

Again the pedlar stirred on the stone floor; but this time, flinging off M'Liquor's grasp, he leaped to his feet and strode forward, a skian-fada in one hand, a pistol in the other.

Before he could reach Red Richard, however, the fierce grasp with which he held his struggling victim suddenly relaxed, his yellow eyes glazed, his jaw fell. He staggered to his feet, looked around with a demoniac glare on the armed pedlar towering up before him, on the motionless forms stretched heavily on the floor.

"Guard—guar', I shay, by Mah"—he uttered, huskily.

No one answered—no one stirred.

The pedlar and the Scot walked to the door, their skenes and pistols in their hands. The two sentinels were leaning against the wall, breathing stertorously.

Then the pedlar and the Scot wheeled and walked back into the great hall where Red Richard and his myrmidons lay on the floor like logs.

"An dhamno rogara ort!" shouted the Scot, as, spurning the body of Red Richard with his hairy shoe, he pulled off a black wig and other belongings and revealed the close-cropped tow head, and jubilant though discoloured face of Gilla-na-bo.

"Una!" cried the pedlar, springing forward and holding out his arms.

In a moment the fiery hair, beard, and eyebrows lay on the floor at the young girl's feet. To be sure the brick-red complexion remained as yet, but Una did not see it. Wild with happiness almost too great to bear, the fair girl threw herself, sobbing, into her lover's arms.

Before Una had quite recovered from her bewilderment she found herself seated, with Irene by her side, in a carriage of the primeval kind in use at that date in Ireland. The driver was Cawbar O'Doherty. O'Brasil rode in front, mounted on the good horse that had borne him thither, while Gilla-na-bo brought up the rear. With the primitive coach, its body swinging on ropes, and of course jolting, leaping, and bumping at every movement, anything faster than a foot-pace became impracticable, O'Brasil then

brought his horse beside the rude vehicle, and while Una, pale with fatigue and excitement, leaned out of the window, he told her briefly how the rescue had been effected.

"And my father—my poor father?" questioned Una, anxiously.

"I have not seen or heard from him since the fatal fight."

"I pray God he may not have fallen," said Una, her soft eyes filling with tears, "and, oh, Shiel, I thought you were slain; I saw you fall, and I suppose I must have lost consciousness then, for the next thing I remember"—with a deep shudder—"I was kneeling beside the body of that dreadful, mail-clad giant, and making an effort to drag it from above you. But I had hardly attempted the task when I heard a hoarse shout and a trampling of feet. I looked up, saw Red Richard, and fled—fled for my life and yours. I had little hope that you were still alive, but I knew that, if you were, Red Dick would murder you before my eyes, if he found you. So I fled from the place, as fast as I was able, and Red Dick pursued me until I fell. He was about to carry Irene to Chichester; and me"——

Chapter 36.

AN INTERRUPTED MARRIAGE.

It was the morning of the third day since the events recorded in our last chapter. On that morning O'Hanlon, Father Edmond, and the others were gathered together in a secret vault of the ancient Abbey of Kilmacrenan, discussing, for the hundredth time, the dark prospects of their country and their friends, and their own plans for the future, none of them roseate hued.

Una had climbed up into the tower with which the vault communicated by a secret stair, to look out along the diverging roads for possible friends or foes; and thither O'Brasil soon followed her.

Una, standing by the grim embrasure, white and fair as a lily, with her sad, sweet face, and the pale light playing in her golden hair, turned to O'Brasil with a subdued, but gracious smile.

"I was thinking of you, Shiel," she said, gravely and sweetly, "and of myself, and of all that I owe you," she continued, in the same tone, "of the fate from which you twice rescued me, I was thinking of all this, and of—how I might repay you," proceeded the fair girl, very lowly, but with a glad, upward glance of her shy, sweet eyes that sent a glow of tremulous happiness through O'Brasil's frame.

"You promised, or nearly promised—which was it?—never again to ask my father for my hand," continued Una, "unless you could prove yourself of noble birth; but you did not promise to refuse that hand if I should offer it to you. Take the poor gift," she added, shyly slipping her white hand into his. "Shiel, take it; it is yours—it is all I have to give, and oh, it is so little!"

"What, now?—my love!—my wife!" exclaimed the young man, hardly daring to believe in the reality of his great happiness.

"Now—when you will."

"My Una!"

O'Brasil clasped his fair love to his heart in such a transport of happiness as is sometimes given to the heart to feel but never to describe.

"Oh, my darling, you have given yourself to a poor, homeless, friendless, nameless waif—a hunted outlaw, with a price upon my head—without a roof to shelter you, or even a country in which I might make a home for my peerless love."

"You forget that I, too, am poor now as yourself," she answered, sadly. "I, too, have lost everything. Shiel, I would be poor, indeed, if I had not your love. You say you must fly at once?" resumed the fair girl, after a short pause."

"As soon as I have seen or heard from Don Eugenio," he replied. "Did I not tell you that I met the Spaniard in the bog-land to which Gilla took me for my pedlar's outfit? Well, he was there, and I handed to him a packet which I had undertaken to convey to him from Grey Granu, but which in the excitement of the previous morning I had forgotten.

"O'Hanlon tells me that the moment he read the missive he set forth in great agitation and with wildest haste for the Grey Woman's cave in Grianan Hill; but earnestly begged O'Hanlon to detain me in the Church of Fahan, or wherever else he might meet or see me, until he should come to me. For that reason, and for that only, I am lingering here in the midst of danger. Una, I have an instinctive belief that the Spaniard knows and will reveal something of my unknown parentage. For that revelation, whether it be good or evil, I mean to wait."

"And after you have seen Don Eugenio you will fly at once?"

"At once. We have fortunately secured a friendly sail, which is waiting to waft us from our country's shore. We are bound for Spain, and after that—heaven only knows!"

Una again placed her hand in his; and O'Brasil guided her down the winding stair to the secret vault below, and led her to Father Edmond.

A few words sufficed to explain to him the nature of the service which the young man required at his hands; a service which the

good Franciscan, who had long looked with lively sympathy on the forbidden love of the young people, joyfully consented to perform.

O'Hanlon, Cawbar O'Doherty, and Gilla-na-bo, formed a little circle around them. The young couple knelt before the priest; but just as the sacred rite which was to make them one was about to commence, a loud knocking was heard at the outer door of the church.

"Friends or enemies?" whispered Father Edmond, anxiously, and suspending the ceremony which he was about to begin, the Franciscan left the vault and disappeared up the dark stairway, treading with noiseless steps. Una and O'Brasil arose from their knees, and the party waited in silence and suspense, half-expecting to hear above them, momentarily, the crash of wrecking timbers and falling masonry, or the crackle of incendiary fires, lit by the torches of some band of English marauders. But the knocking that had alarmed them was not repeated—all above and below was still as a graveyard. A minute passed; then footsteps were heard descending the secret stair; a few more seconds of breathless suspense, and Father Edmond re-entered the vault closely followed by Bryan MacLaughlin and Don Eugenio, with a tall, veiled lady, robed in rich, dark draperies, leaning on his arm. MacLaughlin paused within the entrance to the vault and gazed at his daughter and her lover, standing side by side in the centre of the dim chamber, their arms entwined around each other, with an emotion that seemed too powerful for speech.

O'Hanlon inquired of MacLaughlin: "And where have you been, chieftain, all these days?"

"Searching for my children," answered the old man—"searching fruitlessly, in fear and sorrow. When I found them not in the cave under the Rock of Doon, I explored the woods and hills of Kilmacrenan, thinking that they fled thither, in terror, when the day was lost. I searched far and near; but finding no trace of them, at last, in despair, I crossed Lough Swilly, hoping that they had again found refuge in the cave in Grianan Hill, with the benevolent being who had saved and served them so well before. I found that such was not the case; but there I found Don Eugenio, who was able to give me tidings of my children—of their capture

by Red Richard, and of the daring enterprise undertaken by Captain O'Brasil and my friends here for their rescue, and yet," said MacLaughlin, glancing dubiously from O'Brasil to his daughter, "it would seem that our coming was somewhat inopportune."

"Dear father," said Una, raising her eyes to his with gentle firmness, "O'Brasil has once again saved me from a fate worse than death. I owe everything to him, and I am going to become his wife. Oh, say that you will not forbid me, for if you do I must disobey you!"

"With my hearty sanction and concurrence," added the priest, emphatically. "I was about to perform the marriage ceremony as you entered," he continued, in defiant tone; "and now, with your permission, the sacred rite"—

"Must proceed no further!" interrupted MacLaughlin, sternly. "This young man is not what he seems; let him know himself before he offers to contract a union with the daughter of MacLaughlin!"

"Read this," said Don Eugenio, as, stepping forward to the astonished youth, he put into his hand the identical packet that Grey Granu had before committed to his care for conveyance to the noble Spaniard.

"Can not this communication, whatever it may import, as well be made after the marriage?" demanded O'Brasil, somewhat haughtily.

"Read it, Shiel," said Una; "nothing that it may contain can alter my love for you, or my fixed determination to become your wife. I warn you," she continued, turning to her father and Don Eugenio, "that if you have come here with this hateful paper with the object of heaping further insult, contumely, and humiliation on him I love and honour above all the world, or with the object of preventing our marriage, or lowering him in my eyes, you have failed in your purpose. I will be his wife, despite anything that you, or that scroll you have brought hither, may reveal."

All this time the tall, dark-robed lady had not uttered a word. O'Brasil, feeling convinced that the paper thus thrust upon him contained something of paramount importance—something that would powerfully affect his destiny, whether for good or evil—though, from the sternness of MacLaughlin's renewed interdiction

of his marriage, he feared the latter—retired from the vault, and climbing the winding stair, sat down by the loophole in the tower, to spell out his fate by its feeble ray.

O'Brasil opened the packet, which contained a number of closely-written sheets, traced in the delicate caligraphy which he recognised as that of the Grey Woman of the Cave. He rapidly unfolded the sheets, smoothed them out with trembling touch, and beginning with the first, he read thus:—

“From Finola O'Neill, of Burt, to Owen O'Malley.

“I only ask you to hear me! No criminal is condemned unheard. Why, then, should I? Owen, I will ask you to remember what I was when I became your wife. Surely you will not deny that I loved you then? I tell you now that I loved you better than any created being—until our child was born; then I saw one whom I loved better. My little Roderick!—him I worshipped. Oh, Owen, my husband, how happy we were in those days!—too happy! Our life was too like Paradise, our home too like an Eden. Then the serpent came. He came in the shape of Sir Raymond A'Bois, Governor of Caislean Dhu. You remember that black day when, overtaken by a storm, he sought shelter in our house? You entertained him hospitably. He saw me. My beauty captivated his eye and inflamed his unbridled passions; and our peace was gone.

“A'Bois became a constant visitor at our house. I hated, loathed, and feared him. He had a castle and garrison, with, if necessary, the 'rising out' of a whole province at his command. I knew that he had but to wave his hand to achieve our ruin. For long I affected not to be aware of his hateful passion. I ignored his words, his sighs, his amorous glances. I laughed at his insulting speeches, when in my wild indignation I could have struck him dead. In terror of precipitating you into a mortal quarrel with our powerful enemy, who, I knew, would be only too glad of an excuse for depriving you of your ancient inheritance—in terror for you and for my son—I bore his persecution in silence, until, at length, his advances became too open and audacious, and you began to suspect. You soon grew jealous, for A'Bois was a handsome villain. You thought, perhaps, that since I did not spurn him, his subtle flatteries were acceptable to me. Your jealousy grew upon you. I knew it, and I was miserable. Still,

in increasing terror for my child's prospects, for you, for our lands and home, our all, I yet strove to hide from your knowledge the persecution I was enduring at his hands. One day when you taxed me with the Governor's undue attentions, and I had tried to laugh it off as usual, denying that there was anything in it, you became enraged; and, ordering your horse, left the house in a passion, and rode away.

"You had not been gone an hour when A'Bois came riding, in hot haste, and told me that you had been thrown from your horse, and you were lying in a wood, at some distance from our castle, dying! and that you were calling, with your last strength, for your wife and child. I flew to my child, and, taking him in my arms, called on A'Bois to lead me to you at once. We soon reached the wood; but when we arrived at the place where I expected to find you, I was suddenly surrounded by a party of armed and mounted men, dragged from the horse, gagged, and thrust into a carriage with my child.

"I was carried towards Caislean Dhu, and on the road we passed you—riding homewards. Then I saw what a vile trap I had fallen into. I was carried to Caislean Dhu and placed in charge of a woman—a creature of the governor's.

"I will pass over the stormy scene that followed—his insulting offers, his oaths, his threats, his pleadings. I struck him on the face, when he knelt before me. He left me vowing vengeance. An hour after, he returned to tell me that my husband was at the castle gate, seeking admission, calling for vengeance, and demanding the instant restoration of his wife.

"He affected profound remorse and penitence for having taken me from my home, under a mistaken impression that his passion was returned. He had now seen his error—too late to remedy it. He had given up all hope of winning me and would gladly return me to my husband, if I would undertake to shield him from that husband's vengeance.

"I promised gladly to do what I could, but that would not satisfy him; he declared that I must assure my husband that I had gone away with him of my own free will. I rejected his infamous proposal with disdain. Then the wretch snatched my baby from me. He carried my Roderick into an adjoining closet, leaving the door open so that I could see my child and him from where I sat.

He drew a dagger, held it at my darling's throat, and swore that he would kill him if I did not obey him in every particular, and again, in wild terror for my love, I consented to whatever conditions my ruthless jailer should impose.

"A moment later you came. I saw you at the door, standing between armed guards. All the wrath and shame and horror at the false and revolting words they were trying to force from my unwilling lips rushed back upon my soul. I sprang to my feet, ready to speak the truth and denounce my villainous and cowardly abductor.

"But first I glanced round once more towards the fatal closet. I saw A'Bois raise his murderous blade, my darling stretched out his little arms and called me, and with my starting eyes still fascinated by that horrid scene, I shrieked forth the dreadful words that made my condemnation. I turned to retract the odious falsehood I had uttered to save my son—you were gone!

"I heard A'Bois guards bandying their coarse jibes, and calling after you as you went down.

"Oh, my husband, can I ask you to forgive me for the humiliation of that dreadful moment?

"I saved my son, but alas! at what a fearful cost!

"I turned to my captor and demanded my release. He laughed and told me I was now securely his. I had sealed my own fate, he said; my jealous husband would never take me back.

"When I went to the closet for my child I found on the floor the dagger with which he had threatened my baby's life. It was a sweyne-feder, keen and deadly; I picked it up and hid it in my dress. After a time the duenna came once more, and conveyed me with my child to a secluded pavilion in the castle garden, and locking the door, left me.

"When the night came A'Bois entered the pavilion by a secret passage. He no longer sought to bend me to his will by specious words. He offered brutal violence. But I had the sweyne-feder. I struck. He fell, pierced through the heart.

"A'Bois had left the door of the secret passage by which he entered open. I snatched up my sleeping baby and fled through it, closing it behind me. It led me out on the seashore, far beyond the confines of the Caislean Dhu.

"On the shore I met you—came full upon you suddenly—face to face.

"My God, that meeting !

"You looked at me as if the sight would blast your vision. I sank at your feet. You stooped down, with a word that withered me, tore my child from my arms, and dashed away along the beach. I lurked under a rock by the seashore, and when grey morning came I heard the quick dip of oars. I looked; a boat glided past me; you were in it, and you carried our child in your arms. I called to you, but you would not hear me.

"Owen, I do not blame you—even then I did not; my own lips had shut the gates of mercy.

"The boat shot past me like an arrow. I watched it as it bore away towards a stately ship lying in the offing; and I watched it return without you—without my child. I saw the ship crowd all her canvas and stand out to sea. Then I fled like a wild creature to the woods.

"Lingering still about the seashore, I one day learned that the ship which had carried you away from me had been wrecked and that all on board had gone down to death in the cruel sea. Even then I could not believe that heaven's mercy was shut against me. I still clung to the hope that you were not lost—that God would one day bring you back to me, make clear my innocence, and restore my child.

"You have returned. My husband has returned; and, Owen O'Malley, I have found my son !

"Some two years ago I wandered back to my native place and hid me in the catacomb in Grianan Hill. No one guessed that the Grey Woman of the Cave was the once gay and beautiful Finola O'Neill.

"One day I met a youth on the hillside. He spoke and it was your voice you heard. He had your step and air, your eyes, your brow, your hair. The boy will tell you all that tale himself, and how he fell among murderous enemies, and I saw him no more until the day when I took him up senseless from the bottom of the gorge, and saved him from the English troopers. He told me his story—how he was found by a fisherman, afloat on the waves, lashed to a spar by that torn scarf !

“That precious fragment was preserved by his kind fosterers—he has it still. I matched it to the half in my possession; they fitted together, tint to tint, letter to letter, thread to thread—the mystic scroll of love and blessing was perfect once again !

“Go to him, Owen; see it with your own eyes; hear his story; his fosterers, and those who have known him from infancy, will corroborate it. For me, it needed no corroboration—I know my son !

“Never let my son know that he had a mother. My son, for whose sake I dared and suffered all, must not learn to despise the memory of that hapless mother—to blush at that mother’s name.

“May God enlighten your judgment and instruct your heart !

“You will find me in my cave in Grianan Hill. You will find your son in the person of Captain Sheil O’Brasil, the bearer of this missive.”

The last sheet dropped from the young soldier’s hand—this was the end.

Chapter 37.

UNITED AT LAST.

Meanwhile, in the vault below, Don Eugenio announced that his real name was Owen O'Malley; he was not a Spaniard; but his mother was a Del Castillo, the only daughter of the Count Don Luis Del Castillo. Now, he gave thanks to God that he had recovered his long-lost wife, after a season of unparalleled wrong and suffering, to atone for which should be the future business of his life.

He had found his long-lost and only son and heir, in the person of Captain Shiel O'Brasil. Twenty years ago, the ship in which he had sailed with his son for Spain was wrecked and went down in a sudden storm. As the vessel foundered, he had bound the boy, by his sash, to a spar. When he rose again the spar had been swept out of sight; he never saw it again. He managed to grasp a plank, and floated on it for three days. At the end of that time, he was taken up, senseless and exhausted, by an East Indiaman.

This, in brief, was Don Eugenio's explanation.

The melancholy history of his wife's wrongs and sufferings he forbore to recount, at her request. The subject was too painful—the old wound too sensitive to bear re-opening.

When the story had concluded, MacLaughlin led his daughter to an inner vault, whither O'Hanlon, Father Edmond, and the others also retired, leaving Don Eugenio and his wife in the outer chamber to await their son alone.

The Donna Finola had thrown back her veil, and with her head leaning on her husband's shoulder, her hand clasped in his, stood watching the dark entrance to the mural stairway in a tremor of agitation that shook her slender form like a reed. When at length, O'Brasil, springing down the winding stairs, rushed into the vault, his gaze fell on the tall form, draped in sable robes, a face pale and worn, but beautiful in its eager, yearning, mother-love. He did not need to ask who was this tender, gracious woman, her arms outstretched, a world of deep love in her wistful eyes. "My mother!" he cried, springing forward and clasping her to his heart.

At length MacLaughlin returned to the chamber, with Una on his arm, the others following. Una put her hand in his. The marriage ceremony was again commenced, and at its conclusion the beautiful daughter of MacLaughlin was the Donna Una Del Castillo.

Anyone can see, to this day, a tiny, marshy islet, set in the waters of Port Lough. It is an islet that seems to sit on no very secure foundations; nor, indeed, does it, for it is an artificial isle—one of that class which was made by sinking piles and laying a platform, in the far-off days when lake-dwellings were the fashion with our ancestors. A wooden habitation had once been built on this verdant speck, but it sunk down bodily through the island into the dark depths of the lake below, leaving a great gap in the island shore, and a pool of stygian blackness where it stood.

The Shaking Island was a place of evil repute, it was shunned and feared by all. Yet on the night succeeding Una's marriage a tiny curragh might have been seen gliding over the dark water of Port Lough towards the Shaking Isle. Its occupants were Bryan MacLaughlin, Roderick Del Castillo, and Gilla-na-bo. MacLaughlin carried a boat-hook, which he dipped into the water, feeling carefully in some dark recess among the piles that made the foundations of the island. Presently he fished up an iron ring, with a chain dragging from it.

"Pull!" he whispered. The three men grasped the chain, and tugged at it with all their strength, pulling it up, hand over hand, until, with a rock and a doleful creak of the Shaking Isle, and a universal squatter and rush and splash of its amphibious denizens, a black box swung up out of the black water, and was hauled

ashore. The box was a seaman's chest, water-tight, and heavily clamped with iron.

MacLaughlin at once produced a key, and opened it. It contained a number of large leathern bags, one of which the old man partially opened, disclosing before the eyes of his companions the yellow sheen of broad, golden pieces. "Roderick," he whispered, "you see before you Fineen MacLaughlin's long-hidden treasure—your wife's dower."

The following night a venturesome Spanish barque, running the gauntlet of the English gunboats, dropped down Lough Swilly, and picked up a heavily-laden boat off the shore of Fahan. Its occupants were Roderick Del Castillo and his lovely bride, Don Eugenio and the Lady Finola, Bryan MacLaughlin, and Oghie O'Hanlon. There were also a number of leathern bags, at whose weight the sailors grumbled a little as they hoisted them on board. On the shore Father Edmond and Cawbar O'Doherty stood watching the receding vessel, with eyes dimmed by tears, until, it bore away around a deep curve of the winding coast, and was lost to view.

The devoted priest would not desert his persecuted people; and to the last the stout henchman of O'Doherty, though surrounded by death and dangers on every side, refused to leave the land where his loved chief had lived and died, and where the last of Connor's race was laid to rest.

As the ship stood off Horn Head, in the grey hour between night and morning, another boat sent a loud hail over the brightening sea, and Gilla-na-bo was taken on board, with a dark-eyed girl, whose cheek wore the soft blush of a new-made bride. And so they set forth for their new home under bright and pleasant omens—omens whose gracious promise every passing year saw blossom into fair fulfilment.

Only a few more words, and our tale is finished.

Irene Magennis did not for many days survive the death of Sir Cahir O'Doherty. Oghie O'Hanlon made his way to Brussels, and there tarried, sending letters to his beloved Margaret, by every messenger who could be bribed to deliver them, urging her to fly to him, and forming schemes innumerable to that end. The fair Margaret, indeed, was released from prison, but few of poor Oghie's letters ever reached her, and all his sanguine schemes

were fated to fail. His letters, full of passionate love and longing, instead of being treasured in the heart of the worshipped wife, whom they were meant to cheer and counsel, may be read to-day in that dreary calendar of English wickedness and Irish woe—the State Papers. They were intercepted by Chichester, for what purpose, unless out of the wanton lust of cruelty, it would be difficult to conceive.

Oghie O'Hanlon lived to reap a red harvest of vengeance on the field of Benburb, under the glorious banner of Owen Roe. On that field fell Shawn MacLaughlin, as he rushed to death in the last victorious charge. Poor Phelim Reagh, who was too sorely wounded either to fight or fly, was taken a few weeks after the disastrous affair of Kilmacrenan. He was condemned to death on the gallows.

The beautiful wife of O'Doherty returned to her brother of Gormanstown. The calm, fair Saxon was not one to leave her heart in a husband's grave; hers was the nature that loved the sunshine of prosperity, and made haste to bask itself in pleasant places. As time went on, she forgot her young warrior chief, married happily a lord of the Pale and enjoyed a pension from the Government!

The broad lands of O'Doherty, with all his towns and castles, his fishful streams and fairy isles, his cloud-capt hills and teeming loughs, were gifted bodily to Sir Arthur Chichester, whose long-nursed scheme of spoliation was thus, as too many of such schemes have been, crowned by complete success.

The Lord Deputy doubtless lived happily and died in his bed—so true it is that evil hurts not an evil conscience unless when it fails of its object—and under the singularly appropriate motto—"Honor sequitur fugientem"—founded a family that still usurps the historic heritage of "The Last of the Irish Chiefs."

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